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OLIVE'S TRUST.

By the Author of "Fault on Both Sides," &c.

CHAPTER IX.

It cannot be but he was murder'd here:
The least of all these signs is probable.

2 Henry VI.

THE entrance of the spectral figure and the extinguishing of the light, when taken in connection with the conversation which had immediately preceded the incident, will fully account for the abject state of terror to which the "Worthy Brothers" were reduced that Saturday night in the parlour of the "Load of Hay."

Some moments elapsed before any one of the fraternity could summon up courage to move, but at length, after two or three trembling and unsuccessful efforts, a match was struck and a light obtained, and the "Brothers" advanced in a body cautiously to the spot where the apparition had last been seen.

There was no ghost visible, nothing but a shapeless heap upon the floor, which, upon being examined, proved to be the form of a man, a handsome, light-haired man, whose clothes were torn and blood-stained, and whose face, save where one streak of crimson stained it, exhibited the ghastly pallor of death.

The "Worthy Brothers" overcame their horror in their humanity. They raised the helpless form and laid it on a bench, then, and not till then, from between the blue, parted lips there came a low moan of pain, which told them life was not quite extinct.

The landlord of the "Load of Hay" exerted himself manfully. There was an unoccupied bedroom on the ground floor, and thither he and some of his friends carried the unfortunate man; in the meantime others hastened into the village to fetch the doctor, while, in the parlour, the superstitious cobbler, with bated breath, told to frightened listeners strange stories of omens and appearances announcing death, till not even the fiery brandy dispensed at the "Load of Hay" could put warmth into their shivering limbs.

The doctor, summoned in haste, arrived at the inn very shortly, and, when he saw his patient, he shook his head with the full amount of professional gravity, for his experience told him that all the doctors in Christendom could not save the life of the unfortunate man who lay speechless and senseless on the bed in the little village inn.

They washed the blood from the dying man's face and hair, they cut the clothes from his body, they bound up his wounds, they forced him to swallow restoratives, but from the first there was no hope. The doctor knew he could not live.

The "Worthy Brothers" departed together silently, to talk in whispers as they walked to their homes of the strange scene which they had witnessed, and the landlord and the doctor were left alone in the still chamber where a fellow creature lay dying, past all human aid.

It is a terrible thing to watch and wait for death, and even to the doctor, whose business lay in such scenes, there was in this particular case a special awe which made him unusually grave and silent.

There was absolutely nothing to be done but simply to wait till the soul, with its burthen of crime and sorrow, should leave the body and wing its way to those unknown regions far, far away from this little globe of ours which we call the world.

The battered, wounded, dying man never recovered consciousness—never spoke; but in the early morning, just when the dull, cold, gray mists were first catching the roseate tinge of the rising sun, he, with that strange strength of the dying—with that last effort of vital energy, raised himself to a half-sitting posture in the bed and opened his eyes.

Handsome, blue, sparkling, tender eyes they were, which, wide open, stared straight before him with a strange expression as if they saw something invisible to those who watched him. Then he extended his arms in the same direction, and, in spite of the pain he must have been suffering, a smile lit up his pale, handsome face, and the next moment his head fell back heavily on the pillow.

He was dead!

"All is over," said the doctor, softly, as he laid his hand over the dead man's heart, and gently and tenderly closed his eyes. "Poor fellow! He could have told a strange story had he lived."

"Is he dead?" the landlord asked, in an awe-struck whisper.

The doctor answered him by a silent affirmative movement of the head.

A little later, when the news had spread through Ripplebrook of the ghastly visitant at the "Worthy Brothers'" convivial meeting the night before, the "Load of Hay" was literally besieged by a crowd of curious news-hunters and gossip-lovers, who came to hear from the landlord farther particulars of the extraordinary circumstances.

But little information could they glean, and the majority had to content themselves with gazing from the outside at the little latticed window with the blind down—the window of the room where lay the awful "it" that a few hours before had been "he," while they talked together in whispers, hazarding the wildest possible conjectures upon what had taken place.

Of course the "Worthy Brothers" had a great deal to say on the subject, and, equally of course, each individual member of the fraternity implied that his share in the business had been the most important, and that but for him and for what he had done, etc., etc.

Only one allowed that he had been frightened, and that was the superstitious cobbler. In the first instance, believing the visitant to be a ghost, he had experienced no alarm, but on discovering it was a bleeding, wounded, dying man, he was, as he expressed it, "So skeered he didn't know nothing of what happened." So that the reader will see that if the cobbler was a believer in spectral appearances, he was also a lover of truth, which is more than his friends were.

Ripplebrook boasted of a policeman, but, to the honour of the inhabitants be it told, his office was almost a sinecure.

He strolled about the lanes in uniform, and chatted affably with his acquaintances, and report said he

knew as well where to lay his hands on a pheasant or a hare as anybody in the village.

On this particular Sunday morning, however, the Ripplebrook policeman had something to do. He was placed at the door of the "Load of Hay," with free run of the bar, to prevent the curious, gaping crowd from entering, and on this occasion he found himself in a position of importance.

Emulating the example of certain of the London force, he gave himself airs, and assumed an attitude of superiority, and, by means of nods, winks, shrugs, and shakes of the head, gave his listeners to understand that he knew a great deal more about the matter than he cared to reveal.

Quite early, long before the usual breakfast hour at Chambercombe, Sir Lionel Marston, accompanied by the doctor, made his appearance at the "Load of Hay."

Sir Lionel objected on principle to having his nerves shocked, he shuddered at the very notion of looking at the dead man—all that he left to the coroner; but he had come down, at the doctor's special request, to be present at the inspection of the contents of the pockets of the unfortunate deceased, in order to ascertain if any clue could be discovered to his identity.

None of those who had seen the corpse recognised it.

The murdered man everybody said was undoubtedly a stranger in Ripplebrook, and it was only through the medium of any cards or letters he might have about him that they could hope to find out his name.

On examination it was discovered his pockets had been ransacked, and, with the exception of a few silver coins, contained absolutely nothing.

The presumption was that the unfortunate man had been attacked, beaten senseless, robbed, and left for dead, that he had subsequently recovered sufficient strength and consciousness to stagger to the little inn, where he died without having been able to utter a single word.

Under these circumstances the doctor made a more careful examination of the body than he had hitherto done, and found the third finger of the left hand had been cut, beaten, and twisted in a manner only to be accounted for by the supposition that a ring had been wrenched from it by main force.

At Sir Lionel Marston's suggestion, he and the doctor left the inn to discover, if possible, the spot where the assault and robbery had been committed.

In this they had little difficulty; a few hundred yards away from the inn, in a field abutting on the lane, they found all the signs of a terrible struggle—grass trampled down and blood-stained, and the fallen autumn leaves, which fluttered and whirled in the wind, tinged with the same crimson stain.

They were not the first at the spot. Some of the villagers had found it out before them, and were gazing at the marks of murder with silent awe.

One of the men came up to the baronet, touching his hat.

"Please, your worshipful honour," he said, "I found this—there."

He pointed to the spot where the grass was deepest dyed, and handed Sir Lionel an old envelope stained with blood and a small gold pencil case.

"Good Heavens!" cried Sir Lionel, and handed the scrap of paper to the doctor, after examining it himself.

It was evident that the dying man, on recovering consciousness, had endeavoured to write on an old envelope a few words explanatory of what had happened but the darkness and his weakness had made many of the words illegible, while the blood dripping from his wounds had totally obliterated others.

It was with an eager melancholy the doctor took the ensanguined testimony of crime in his hands, and, with a terrible but shuddering interest, he strove to decipher the all but illegible writing.

The following few words were the only ones that were distinct:

"... Attacked, murdered, and rob ... Scoundrel ... merald ring ... tal secret ... She will know all ... dying."

There was no signature to this document, but the envelope on which it was written bore a London post-mark and was addressed:

"Captain Greville Paisley,
"Care of Rawdon Markham, Esqr.,
"The Lodge,
"Ripplebrook."

"Great Heavens!" said Sir Lionel Marston again as he took possession of the document. "Great Heaven! Who is to break the news to his wife?"

CHAPTER X.

Frythe, say on;
The sitting of thine eye and cheek proclaim
A matter from thee. King John.

SUNDAY morning at Ripplebrook Lodge. The sun was shining brightly, the birds were singing gaily, the trees shone in their brightest autumn lustre, and

from the valley, borne on the soft wind, came the sound of the church bells ringing merrily in honour of the day.

It was one of those bright, clear, pleasant autumn mornings which present to us the very realisation of beauty and tranquillity, and even Mrs. Greville Paisley, who had no scruple in announcing herself bored by the country, could not forbear a tribute to the loveliness of the landscape spread before her by bounteous Mother Nature as she walked on the lawn after breakfast with Cora and Alice Markham.

Olive was not there. At the conclusion of the matutinal meal she had gone to her own room.

More and more, in her desire to solve the mystery of her father's disappearance, she was isolating herself even from her sisters.

Now, on this especial Sunday morning, she had no thoughts but for the expected return of Captain Paisley, who might be able to give her some clue which she might follow up and learn the whereabouts of her father.

Seated at the open window of her room, she looked out over the lovely Ripplebrook valley, but for once she had no eyes for the beauty of the scenery, she looked only for the return of the man who, as far as she knew, was the only person in the world who could explain her father's disappearance.

On the lawn below her were her sisters and Mrs. Paisley, but Olive heeded them not, yet, if there is any truth in the old saying, her ears should have tingled and burned at that moment, for she and she alone was the subject of conversation.

"My dear girls," said Mrs. Greville Paisley, in her pleasantest manner, "I would not for the world induce you to separate yourselves from your elder sister, but you must remember she is only your sister, and that you by no means owe her that implicit obedience she would exact from you. If you like to accept the invitation to stay a month or two with Greville and myself in London, you can do so with or without Olive's sanction. You are not babies. You can act for yourselves."

"We should like to go very much," Cora answered, "but Olive says—"

"My darling, I don't want to know what Olive says. She is a very good girl, but I'm afraid, not quite right in her head. A very strange girl."

"She is very kind," said Alice, half-apologetically.

"Yes, she means to be very kind; but that is no reason why she should take an absolute command over you. Why, my dears, if you were to follow and obey her implicitly your lives would be miserable. She is but two or three years older than you are, yet she talks and acts as if she were your mother."

"I don't see," said Cora, "that we owe her implicit obedience. I can judge for myself."

"Yes, dear, and act for yourself, too, I hope."

Thus it was that Mrs. Greville Paisley, having failed to obtain Olive's confidence, sought to make allies of her two younger sisters.

It was no very difficult task to turn the heads of two young girls, dazzled already by her beauty and grandeur, and by her talk of the pleasures and gaieties of London life.

Cora and Alice loved Olive, but they had never been her companions.

Olive from her earliest years had been the mistress of the household. The cares of life—if such trifles can be called cares—had come upon her as soon as she was able to comprehend them.

For her father's sake she had undertaken them heart and soul, and had grown up without any of that love of pleasure natural to most girls.

Her pleasure, as well as her duty, was to keep her father's house in order. She had, so to speak, never been a girl. She had emerged from the nursery a full-grown woman, and had, as a matter of course, taken charge of Cora and Alice as she did of the plate and the keys of the linen chest.

When Cora and Alice grew older and talked of lovers and dress and pleasure, as girls will, they met with rebuke rather than sympathy from their elder sister, so it came about, by natural courses, that their love for Olive changed from warm, confidential, sisterly feeling to a certain amount of honour, respect, and, if the truth be told, fear.

Under these circumstances both girls were open to receive the insidious sophistries of Mrs. Greville Paisley into their minds, and the task of making them assert their own freedom and independence became comparatively easy.

Innocent and unsophisticated, how should they doubt the sincerity of Mrs. Greville Paisley, the fine London lady, who kissed them, taught them how to dress their hair fashionably, asked them to stay with her in town, and who, moreover, had been for years so near and dear a friend of their father's?

"You know, my dears," said Mrs. Paisley, in conclusion, "Olive has no real authority over you. If you choose to say you will accept my invitation, there is an end of the matter."

"But what will Olive do by herself?"

"Count the tablespoons and see the sheets are well aired," Mrs. Paisley answered, with a light laugh.

She gained her point, and when the trio left the lawn and entered the house to dress for church Cora and Alice had promised Mrs. Paisley to go back with her to London and stay for a few weeks.

Olive, still in the solitude of her own room, waited and waited, in the hope that every minute would bring Captain Paisley back to Ripplebrook, with tidings of her father, but the hope was a vain one.

The suspense became terrible to the poor girl, and she left her seat by the window to pace up and down the room. To her came the sound of merry speech and cheery laughter from the little party on the lawn, and no words can tell how terribly these sounds jarred upon her ears.

Presently there came the sound of wheels upon the drive, followed immediately by a ring at the front door.

Olive's heart leaped for joy, for she didn't doubt Captain Paisley had returned. Without a moment's hesitation she opened her door and ran downstairs.

In the hall she met the servant.

"Where is he? Where is Captain Paisley?" she asked, eagerly.

The man stared at her in stupid, blank astonishment.

"It ain't the captain, miss," he answered. "It's Sir Lionel Marston, and he wants to see Mrs. Greville Paisley."

Olive stopped short, the light left her eyes, and she staggered as if she had received a blow. It was indeed a blow she had received, though not a physical one. It was the hardest of blows to bear—that of bitter disappointment.

She faltered out to the amazed servant that he should acquaint Mrs. Paisley with Sir Lionel Marston's arrival, and so overwhelmed was she by the crushing of her expectations that it was not until she was in her own room again that it occurred to her as a strange incident that the wealthy baronet of Chambercombe should drive up to Ripplebrook Lodge on Sunday morning, just before church-time, and ask, not for her, but for a visitor staying in the house.

Cora and Alice were in Mrs. Paisley's room inspecting some "sweet" dresses and "loves of bonnets," just fresh from Paris when Sir Lionel was announced.

Even Mrs. Paisley looked surprised when she heard of the visitor awaiting her in the drawing-room, while the two girls were loud in their expressions of amazement and wonderment.

Whatever may have been the fine lady's curiosity, she would not depart from her usual practice to gratify it, and, instead of hastening downstairs, she waited to complete a careful and elaborate toilette.

Never in Cora's eyes had she looked so bewitching or so radiant as she fastened a coquettish little bonnet on her luxuriant hair, and, taking her dainty little gloves in her hand, walked leisurely downstairs to the drawing-room.

Cora and Alice, left to themselves, speculated to their hearts' content on the unexpected visit, for it was but rarely Sir Lionel Marston crossed the threshold of Ripplebrook Lodge.

Although outwardly he chose to ignore the village gossip which spoke of his stepson and Olive as lovers, he had, as a matter of course, heard of it again and again, and he was still far too much incensed against Charles Wilding to look with kind eyes upon those who loved him, consequently the intercourse between the Lodge and Chambercombe had been for some time confined to the occasional interchange of stately civilities, which made his call on Sunday morning all the more extraordinary.

For a quarter of an hour the two sisters curbed their curiosity as best they could, then the sound of the opening of the drawing-room door told them the baronet was about to take his departure.

With one accord they ran to the window, and saw, to their intense amazement, Sir Lionel Marston go out accompanied by Mrs. Greville Paisley.

Hat in hand, with stately, old-fashioned courtesy, he handed the lady into his carriage, then, giving some directions to the coachman, followed her himself, and the next moment the carriage was being driven as fast as a pair of horses could take it down the hill towards the village.

So surprised, so astounded by this strange and unlooked-for event were the two sisters that for the sake of mere sympathy of astonishment they ran to Olive's room and poured forth the news with startling volubility.

Scarcely had Olive had time to master the intelligence when there was a knock at the door of her room, and Phoebe, the housemaid, entered with a wild, scared expression of countenance.

"Oh, miss—oh, if you please, miss!" she cried, then stopped and gasped for breath.

"Wall Phoebe?"

"Oh, miss, please, Mrs. Greville Paisley says her kind love, miss, and—you're not to wait for her. She's gone down into Ripplebrook with Sir Lionel."

"Very well, Phoebe."

Olive's coolness contrasted strangely with the servant's excitement. Phoebe lingered still, then burst out with:

"Oh, miss, have you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Oh, shocking, miss—terrible!"

"What is it?"

"Oh, if you please, poor Captain Paisley, he's been robbed and murdered, and is a lying all cold and stark at the 'Load of Hay.' Oh, ain't it awful, miss?—we never know whose turn's a coming next!"

CHAPTER XI.

I'll bury sorrow for his death
In the grave with him.

Mansinger.

THERE was a still larger concourse of excited, gossiping villagers round the door of the "Load of Hay" when Sir Lionel Marston's carriage dashed up than there had been when the baronet had paid his first visit in the morning, but the Chambercombe livery always received respect, and the gaping rustics opened out a lane between themselves to allow the great man to pass from his carriage to the inn.

When the idle, lounging, gossip-loving inhabitants of Ripplebrook saw Sir Lionel pause at his carriage-door and address a few words to some one inside, they wondered; when that some one proved to be a strange lady, they were amazed; and when the lady, taking the baronet's arm, walked with him into the "Load of Hay," they, with one accord, lifted up their heads, turned up their eyes, and blessed their hearts, their stars, and their garters.

The doctor was still there, and came forward to meet Sir Lionel and the lady, while the landlord bowed and fidgeted in the background.

"This is Mrs. Greville Paisley," said the owner of Chambercombe, nervously.

Mrs. Paisley was the only one self-possessed and calm of the four. It seemed hardly credible to the three men that this fine, beautiful lady, clad in the richest and gayest dress, seemingly more fit for a duchess's drawing-room than for the low-ceilinged, sanded-floored parlour of a village ale-house, could be the widow of that battered, bruised, blood-stained thing that lay in the adjoining chamber.

It was so marvellously inconsistent, so difficult to realise the connection between the incarnation of beauty and fashion and the murdered man, and although Mrs. Paisley had come down to the "Load of Hay" for an express purpose, no one, now that she was there, dared mention the purpose to her.

After a short silence, she herself referred to the object of her visit, and asked where the body lay and if she could see it at once.

The doctor bowed affirmatively and signed to her to follow him, which she did, gathering up her voluminous skirts and picking her way daintily along the dark, narrow passage.

At the end was a poorly furnished little room, with the ceiling so low that a tall man could hardly have stood upright in it.

The only window was a small lattice, over which the curtains had been drawn, so that the corners of the apartment were in deep shadow, but what light there was streamed full in upon the shabby bed on which lay the ghastly corpse.

Without a shudder, without a tremor, Mrs. Greville Paisley walked straight up to the bedside, and gazed long and earnestly on the pale face of her dead husband.

"This is Captain Paisley," she said, and turned round towards the three men who were standing by, "this is Captain Paisley—my husband—do you require anything more from me?"

"No, madam, no—certainly not—now. At the inquest I fear it will be necessary for you to attend," answered Sir Lionel Marston, and in reply Mrs. Greville Paisley inclined her head.

The on-lookers had anticipated some great burst of excitement, some great show of feeling, but whatever might have been Mrs. Paisley's true sentiments she kept them well under control, and neither by word nor action showed that an affair which would have driven fifty women out of a hundred crazy had the least effect upon her.

In gazing at her husband's corpse she betrayed not the least emotion. She looked at it with the outward indifference with which she might have inspected a ghastly picture; but who shall say what thoughts, what fears, what plans, what schemes, what sentiments were in truth agitating her bosom?

She had gone to the "Load of Hay" that bright, fresh, sunshiny Sunday morning to identify her husband's body. She had done so. Her thoughts were her own, and she took good care to shroud them so that no eyes, however prying, should penetrate their sanctuary.

Those who watched her had anticipated what is termed "a scene." They had been prepared for floods of tears, for moanings and lamentations; instead of which, to their surprise, they met with a calmness, a coolness, which to them was perfectly unintelligible.

"Is there anything else you want me for?" asked Mrs. Greville Paisley.

At this question the doctor came forward, and in a few words as possible told all that he knew of the sad affair, and the lady listened to his narration with calm, unmoved features.

It was only when Sir Lionel Marston spoke of the discovery of the envelope with the few pencil-written words upon it that Mrs. Paisley betrayed any real excitement. Then, with an eagerness there was no mistaking, she requested to see the scrap of paper, and the Chambercombe baronet produced it without hesitation from his pocket-book.

Earnestly she scrutinised the words scrawled in the despairing energy of death, straining her lustrous eyes over those portions where the blood-stains had obliterated the pencilled syllables, after which she desired to retain possession of the paper, but that Sir Lionel would not permit.

"It must remain in my hands, madam," said he, "till after the inquest, then of course it shall be handed to you."

Mrs. Paisley bowed her head acquiescently, and asked permission to copy the words, a permission which was, of course, readily accorded to her, and in a pretty little morocco-bound bignon of a note-book she transcribed with a jewelled, gold pencil-case those disjointed words already known to the reader.

After a few more unimportant speeches, the four left the chamber of death and returned into the parlour where the "Worthy Brothers" were in the habit of holding their weekly meetings.

"You require me no longer, Sir Lionel, I suppose?" said Mrs. Paisley, and the baronet in reply in the negative offered to drive Mrs. Paisley back to Ripplebrook Lodge, an offer which she gratefully declined.

"I would rather walk, Sir Lionel," she said, "and excuse me if I say I would rather walk alone."

Then, with a sweeping, stately bow, she left them, passing out of the inn door by the crowding villagers as if she perceived them not, and over the stile into the pathway which led to Ripplebrook Lodge.

"Well!" cried Sir Lionel, as soon as she was out of the house, "she took it coolly enough at any rate!"

"Don't be too sure of that," the doctor rejoined. "Whenever—my experience tells me—there are tears, weeping, hysterics, lamentations, and distractions, the patient soon recovers; it is when the accumulated grief and misery are close pent up and have no outlet that serious consequences ensue."

"But she treated it all as coolly as—as—as—a cucumber," said Sir Lionel, at a loss for a simile.

"The more likely she to have felt it acutely. True, heartfelt misery is invariably silent," replied the doctor, then he quitted the inn with the Chambercombe baronet, and the landlord was left alone in charge of the dead.

In spite of being precise and methodical, notwithstanding that she had a good deal of old-maidish primness, Olive Markham had very strong feelings, and was of an impulsive nature. It was the easiest thing in the world to rouse her compassion, and when the loquacious Phoebe told her the story of Captain Paisley's murder, with all the village additions, the tears flowed freely from her eyes.

All her dislike and mistrust of the woman whose husband had been so foully slain she threw from her, and in its stead there came a deep, heartfelt pity and sympathy, a desire to condole and comfort, and an ardent wish to say or do something to alleviate the young widow's suffering.

From the lawn she watched for the return of Sir Lionel Marston's carriage, in order that she might at once proffer her service and her sympathy to Mrs. Greville Paisley.

Inconsistent as this may appear with her former conduct, it was none the less true.

The susceptible chords in Olive's heart vibrated at the great sorrow that had come upon her father's guest, and she buried all her dislike, all her animosity in the presence of such great misfortune.

The bells of the Ripplebrook church rang merrily, the birds sang gaily, the sun shone brightly, but the light of nature was shadowed to Olive, and the harmony of nature was discordant, for her thoughts were of the little shabby bedroom of the village inn, where lay, cold and pale, the body of Captain Greville Paisley, foully murdered.

Presently, coming along the field path which led up the hill from the village to Ripplebrook Lodge, Olive saw Mrs. Paisley, in all the glory of her fashionable costume, returning from her sad errand.

Olive's heart swelled with compassionate sorrow, and she hurried to meet the newly made widow.

Not able for the moment to trust herself to speech, the young girl took Mrs. Paisley's hand in both her own and gazed into her face with tearful, sympathising eyes, and for a minute they stood regarding each other.

Olive was the first to break the silence.

"Is it—it—true?" she asked.

"Yes—it is true," answered Mrs. Paisley. "Poor Greville!"

Her voice was perfectly calm, without the slightest trace of any emotion, and Olive wondered. Mrs. Paisley, too, wondered, for she could not comprehend in her worldly wisdom the change in Olive's manner—she could not appreciate the gentleness of heart which conquered all petty dislikes in the one great feeling of sympathising pity.

As they walked slowly round the lawn Mrs. Greville Paisley told Olive what she had seen and heard in the last hour—told her how Sir Lionel Marston had come to break the news to her, and had driven her down to the inn to identify her husband's body; yet, harrowing as was the scene which she described, she did not by even so much as a tremor of the voice betray either agitation or grief.

"Oh, Mrs. Paisley!" Olive cried, in an outburst of genuine enthusiasm, "I hardly know how to speak to you of this misery. What can I say? What can I do? The usual trite words of common-place condolence are out of place in such a great sorrow as this. Believe me, from the very bottom of my heart I do commiserate your sufferings! Would I could do anything to alleviate them. Is there anything I can do?"

"Thank you, dear," Mrs. Greville Paisley replied.

"If there is a decent dressmaker in Ripplebrook perhaps you'll send for her early to-morrow morning. I must have some mourning made. Helgho! And black is so unbecoming to my complexion!"

CHAPTER XII.

Both men and women bely their nature
When they are not kind.

Pestus.

SENSITIVENESS for others is an undoubted virtue, though it may be carried to an extreme which makes it little short of a fault.

Olive Markham, in her deep commiseration for Mrs. Greville Paisley, almost forgot the unfriendly feelings she had previously nourished towards that lady, and her only desire now was to show sympathy to Mrs. Paisley in her great sorrow.

To Olive the sad death of Captain Paisley was something so tremendous in its awfulness that she could think and speak of nothing else. Mentally she was for ever picturing the scene in the village inn—the tiny chamber with its curtained window, its bed with the ghastly occupant—and the knowledge of the tragedy preyed upon her mind and spirits. In imagination she strove to realise the desolation and despair of a wife thus made a widow, and it seemed to her that the grief must be all but insupportable.

She feared even to harrow Mrs. Paisley's mind by referring to it; but she need have been under no such apprehension, for, outwardly at all events, Mrs. Greville Paisley was far more concerned as to how she could get her mourning ready for the inquest than about the sad necessity which called for her adoption of the widow's dress.

The lady evidently had either no feelings or else held them so completely under control that none but herself knew of their existence, and though, when spoken to by Olive, she assumed the doleful look and tone of voice necessary to her bereavement, her words lacked the ring of genuine feeling, and it seemed almost as if Olive Markham grieved more for the death of the fair-haired captain than did his widow.

Yet this was not necessarily a fact. It is by no means to be inferred that those who betray the greatest emotion feel the deepest grief. We all know the long, patient, silent sorrow which eats into the heart but shows no outward sign, yet that sorrow hardly permits itself to go with energy into the details of dress, the mourning symbol of bereavement.

Olive could not understand it. She was an innocent, unsophisticated country girl, bred in an atmosphere of purity, and it seemed to her impossible that every wife should not love her husband with that perfect fullness of heart which characterised her own affection for Charles Wilding.

In spite of all evidence to the contrary, she could not bring herself to imagine Mrs. Greville Paisley anything but heartbroken, and by every means in her power she strove to convey her sympathy to the young widow. To tell the truth, Mrs. Paisley did not understand her. Worldly wise people have but too frequently a way of always looking below the surface for the meaning of a thing, so that when confronted by innocence, and met by truth, they fall to

see it while looking for another interpretation of words or actions which does not exist.

In brief, Mrs. Paisley was an intensely selfish woman. She thought of herself long before she bestowed a thought on another, and, having no heart, she believed when she had donned her crape, and said "poor Greville," in a sufficiently dolorous voice, with a black-edged handkerchief to her eyes, she had paid the requisite tribute to her husband's memory.

The whole of Ripplebrook pitied the young widow profoundly. It is a sad reflection for those of us who are ugly and shabby that pity flows far more readily for the beautiful and well dressed, but such is undoubtedly the case. Had Mrs. Greville Paisley been a dowdy, sallow woman, with a squint, I doubt much whether Sir Lionel Marston would have been as anxious about her as he was, and assuredly he would never have sent his carriage for her on the day of the inquest to take her to the "Load of Hay," where the coroner's jury were waiting to decide how Captain Paisley met his death.

The Ripplebrook dressmaker, who had received full and ample instructions, had acquitted herself creditably, and those were not wanting to declare that never had the unfortunate lady appeared to such advantage as she did in her widow's weeds.

It is not necessary for us to follow the coroner's inquiry through all its stages. No facts of any importance were elicited during the inquest which are not already known to the reader, and the verdict, as a matter of course, was, "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

Speaking of Mrs. Greville Paisley in theatrical parlance, I feel inclined to say, "In the inquest-scene, in the rôle of the young widow, she achieved a decided and unequivocal success."

She was much pitied and more admired, she gave her evidence in a clear, straightforward manner, she concealed her emotion with her handkerchief in the most approved style, and conducted herself from first to last in a way that won the admiration of everybody.

"You have borne up bravely, my dear madam—wonderfully," said Sir Lionel Marston, taking her hand to lead her to the carriage, when the coroner, with a gracious bow, informed her he no longer required her attendance.

"Ah, Sir Lionel, what should I have done without you?" she answered, with ever so gentle a hand pressure. "You—and my other kind friends."

"Gad, madam, I—I—I'm quite at your service—quite."

The old baronet, fascinated, as all men invariably were, by the graces of Mrs. Greville Paisley, was only deterred by the circumstances of time and place from launching out into those extravagant, high-flown, wordy compliments which had been the fashion in his youth, and as he walked back to Chambercombe, the carriage having gone to the Lodge with Mrs. Paisley, he repeated to himself again and again, with much apparent pleasure:

"Wonderful—wonderful woman, and, Gad, she's as lovely as she is wonderful. Wonderful woman!"

When Mrs. Greville Paisley returned from the inquest, Olive Markham ran into the hall to meet her.

Mrs. Paisley, somewhat paler than usual, but radiantly lovely, in a dress which was a miracle for Ripplebrook, with her hair in perfect order, her hands daintily gloved, and a marvel of a French bonnet on her head, showing inside the dainty rim of white, the fashionable apology for a widow's cap, presented an extraordinary contrast to the daughter of the house.

Olive's thoughts during the whole morning had been on Mrs. Paisley's terrible ordeal. She had cried out of pure, sensitive sympathy till her eyes were red and swollen; she had suffered her hair to fall in negligent disorder about her shoulders, and had had no heart to pay attention to those simple, elegant adornments of the toilette which usually distinguished her.

She met Mrs. Paisley in the hall, and looked full into her face with her large, innocent, trusting eyes, and, with a tongue that could hardly articulate, asked for news of what had happened.

In a matter-of-fact way Mrs. Paisley told her of the verdict.

"Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown. It's very sad, is it not? The police are confident they will find out the assassins, my dear. The police generally are confident. Poor Greville!"

The handkerchief went up to her eyes to hide the tears that were not there.

"How terribly you must have suffered," said Olive, in an awe-struck voice.

"Oh, terribly. By the way, Olive, if I may take the liberty—luncheon's gone down, of course—a glass of sherry and a biscuit. Thank you, dear."

Olive rang the bell and gave the order in amazement. She, who had no connection, with no share in the tragedy, had hardly eaten a mouthful the whole

day, had never even thought of such a thing as luncheon, yet the person most nearly concerned could talk coolly and quietly of events which would have driven Olive mad, and asked for sherry and biscuits as if she had merely been for a pleasure drive or to pay a morning call.

In the course of the afternoon Olive made two or three fresh attempts to condole with Mrs. Greville Paisley, but, like the others, they proved failures. Mrs. Paisley simply did not understand her, and sympathy being soon exhausted if it meets with neither gratitude nor confidence in return, Olive gave up her endeavour, seeing that her pity had been altogether wasted, believing, naturally enough, although she had striven hard against the belief, that her guest was a woman without heart, without feeling, and without principle.

Mrs. Paisley was a lady who relied upon herself; she neither asked nor cared for sympathy. She had no emotions, no extreme sensibilities, and she could not comprehend them in others. The hollow, artificial world in which she lived her life contented itself with certain empty forms and common-place words in lieu of genuine feeling, and Olive's "odd" language and passionate outbursts only made Mrs. Paisley deem her a stranger girl than ever.

Olive, repulsed, though unintentionally, her sympathy slighted, and her motives misunderstood, left the young widow alone, and, conquering her own feelings to the best of her ability, gave herself up to calmly reflecting on the murder of Captain Paisley as affecting her father and herself.

The more she thought over the matter the more perplexing it appeared to her. It seemed to her as if she was in a maze from which there was no escape. On every side she was surrounded by suspicious circumstances, but in no one instance was there complete evidence of anything.

She had before her the component parts of a puzzle which might or might not some day be put together, and she sat turning and twisting each piece to see how it might be made to fit, till, brain-weary, she sank into a deep sleep, from which she did not awake for some hours.

(To be continued.)

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT.

CHAPTER XL.

ERNEST could have smiled at the fact of receiving that which he knew to be an almost valueless collection of coloured and polished glass and flint stones, but for the earnestness with which the persistent Ulghitha pressed them upon him.

"I am sure now, Ulghitha," he said, "that you mean to serve us. I will hide these jewels, for we must not let my mother know we have them. Wait, I will be back in a moment."

He left the room, and Ulghitha said to herself: "There! I am rid of them. So long as I knew that I carried a king's ransom in my pocket I felt as if I was foolish not to trample upon every good thought and fly away to enjoy my wealth. True, I meant not to desert the dear one above; but I had the thought ever present not to give up that great wealth. Heaven forgive me! I even dreamed of returning to England, to live in luxury, to flaunt my riches in the faces of those proud titled dames who used to envy my beauty and scorn its possessor because she was of low birth. When I reflected that my sister is a noble lady, my mother a countess—ah! I was tempted to keep the gems; then if I escaped from the forest with them, and once saw her and the lad in safety, once saw my mother again—then would I become a rich dame of Oxford and be one of the great. Well, the lad has the gems now, and I shall never speak of them again, nor ask him where he has hidden them."

"They are hidden," said Ernest, when he returned, which he soon did; there was a merry look in his bright eyes as he spoke, which Ulghitha saw, and attributed to the joy he felt in having recovered at least half his father's gems, but it arose from the thought of how both Rudolph and Ulghitha had been deceived.

"I'll tell her all about it some day," he thought, "when there can be no danger in doing so."

"Do not tell me where you have hidden them," said Ulghitha, who now began to prepare the meal of which she had spoken.

"Tell me, Ulghitha," Ernest asked, "since you have been in the forest, have you ever, with your own hands, killed anybody?"

"No, no! Thank Heaven, no!" she replied.

"But I have seen black deeds done, my master, and shared in the spoil. Oh! here she cried, as she drew another small sack from her bosom and hurled it far from her—"away with that! the share of the gold Rudolph and I have taken from travellers! He has the other half; I wish he had it all. Touch it not, lad! there's blood upon some of it—not shed

by my hand, though I am as guilty as those who struck. See what a little sack holds it all! and think of the many sins that were done to win it. Let it lie there. Let us speak of what we are to do. I shall not close my eyes at night so long as we remain in this house. I shall be awake and roaming here and there over it to see that Rudolph does not make an entrance. During the day I will sleep, when I desire, and you can be on guard. But have no fear that he will show himself in the day-time. He is a great coward, and he is afraid of my knife, which is poisoned. You have no knife—oh, it would not matter if you had, for what could so little a fellow do against a great tall man like Rudolph?"

"I might do a great deal," replied Ernest, with flashing eyes. "In defending my mother I should be as strong as a man!"

Ulghitha gazed admiringly upon the handsome, heroic boy, from whose dark eyes beamed the warlike spirit and steady courage of his grandfather, Egbert the Bold.

"At least you would have the bravery of a man," said Ulghitha, "and that is often better than strength."

"Hansfelt took my dagger from me," continued Ernest, "but not until I had given him a taste of it."

"I warrant that," laughed Ulghitha. "But I will see that you have another. Now return to your mother, who may need your presence, while I am busy here."

Ernest, well pleased in being able to believe that Ulghitha, whom he had so much feared, was now his firm friend, hastened away to converse with Lady Louise, leaving Ulghitha preparing supper.

We will now follow the steps of Rudolph, after he had gotten out of the sight of his wife.

The vindictive and avaricious ruffian had no design to depart for France without having first made an effort to take signal revenge upon Ulghitha for having deprived him of half of the supposed gems, and at the same time to recover them, as well as the hoardings she had also retained.

"At least," thought Rudolph as he plunged into the deep ravine near the inn, "if I cannot get the other half of the jewels, I can set fire to the inn, and perhaps have the satisfaction of burning her to death."

He was sorely puzzled in trying to comprehend why Ulghitha had so suddenly changed her whole character, becoming so devoted to Lady Louise and inimical to him. Had he found, on his return with the boy, that Ulghitha had fled with all the jewels, deserting the inn and all that it contained, and leaving him to shift for himself, he would not have been so greatly amazed. In truth, as he had told her, he had been very uneasy in his mind lest she might have played him such a trick. It was precisely what he had resolved to do with her.

But to hear her declare that she wished him to depart from her for ever, to see her retain half of the spoil, and intimate that she might give it to Lady Louise, made his beard bristle with rage and wonder.

"The evil one is in the head and heart of Ulghitha," he concluded. Whereas we know that the evil one had been flying away from her head and heart ever since she had discovered that Lady Louise was her half-sister.

After getting beyond the view of his wife, he moved on for some time, and concealed himself in the bushes, saying:

"I'll lie here for a time, and think the matter over. I must fix upon a plan of action. She's quicker than lightning with her claws. The claws are bad enough in themselves, but when they have a knife in them, and that knife poisoned, I am afraid of her! She'd as soon die as not, I wouldn't. I'd rather live and enjoy things. But if I leave her behind me alive, somewhere she'll be rising up when I least want her. Perhaps just as I am about to wed some handsome French lady yonder where I am going, Ulghitha will start up from the admiring assemblage, and yell out, 'Hold! he is my husband, and his name is Rudolph Schwartz, a thief, a robber, an assassin!' Ho, when her tongue gets a-going, don't it spin out bad names? No, I must make sure of her and that boy. There's my dream now. He'll be starting up some day, perhaps just as the King of France is about to stand godfather to the son I mean to be father of, and hook out before all the envious nobles, 'Halt! all that rascal's wealth is mine! I am the son of the diamond merchant he robbed!' Now what a scandal that would be for me and the court! So I must break that egg before it hatches."

Thus meditating, he waited until darkness had set in, then began his stealthy return towards the inn.

(To be continued.)

It is currently reported that the so-called "Caesar's Camp," at Wimbledon, has been let by the owner, Mr. Drax, M.P., for building purposes.



[THE SECRET CIPHER.]

THE RIVAL GEMS.

CHAPTER X.

If he arm, arm; if he strow mines of treason,
Meet him with countermines.

Beaumont and Fletcher.

WHEN Caleb reached River View he handed the horses over to another servant and hurried to his room, which was in the left wing of the mansion.

His first action after entering the small apartment was to lock the door.

This he had never done before. Why should he do it now?

"I don't want to be disturbed," he murmured, putting the key in his pocket. "I've been thinkin' since I went down to Rosedale, an', consarn my ugly pictur', if I don't believe that somethin' is on that 'ere paper as is important. I take notice as I go along that a gentleman, as he pretends to be, doesn't carry paper in his pocket with nothin' on it."

He took the crumpled paper from his old wallet, and laid it on his table. Then he drew a chair up to the table, and, seating himself in it, began to smooth the creases of the paper.

Nothing moved but his great hands, and the paper which yielded to them. Crease after crease he smoothed until his work was done. The paper lay before him in the light of the lamp, almost as straight as it was in its palmiest days.

"By George!" exclaimed Caleb, after looking at the paper a moment. "That's what some fellers'd call a cipher; but to me it's a great deal, if I can jest only work it out. That's the way that the Italian an' the woman what dresses in black write to each other. Confound me if it ain't! But the epistle to Mr. Somebody ain't all here. A portion's been torn off; but mebbe what's left will do a powerful sight of good, pervidin' I can work it out. Well, here goes!"

Caleb planted his elbows on the table, put his head between his great hands, and threw his whole attention into the cipher, which ran as follows:

"028] *\$1221 31†91 6†\$12 —02 †91 †31] xx†31
] 371†022] 028] 12\$5] 502. §—"

He looked at it for nearly an hour before he moved a muscle, or took his eyes from the cabalistic letters.

"Well," he said, at last, drawing a long breath, "I'll be consarned if that don't beat all! I wonder if Mr. Garbrashi got that up all hisself. If he did he's a 'cute chicken. That's his hand-writing, for I've seen it afore, an' what I once see I never forget.

He's gone and wrote to that woman in black, and it didn't suit his lordship. So he poked it in his pocket. Now, let me see what I can make out of it."

He rose and took pencil and paper from his trunk, and returned to the chair. He resumed, aloud:

"My little knowledge of printing will help me now. Well, there's five brackets (}), four sections (§), two daggers (†), four double daggers (‡), one dash (—), one asterisk (*), an' the parallel (||)."

As he named the marks, he wrote them upon the paper he had brought from his trunk."

"There's more brackets than anythin' else, an' it's said that people use more 'e's' in their letters than any other one letter of the alphabet. So I'll call the brackets 'e's.' Now the sneakin' fellar transposes some of his figgers, as I can see. Thus, '21' and '12' are one letter, which I say is 'l,' the twelfth letter. Of course '71' means '17,' because there ain't seventy-one letters in the alphabet; if there had been, I'd never larned to read. So '02' means '20,' '31' means '13,' and '91,' '19,' of course. The figgers denote the number that the letters correspond with in the alphabet."

He wrote for some time, until his paper was covered with the different results of his calculations.

"There!" he cried, at last, looking proudly up from his work. "Mr. Garbrashi, you ain't as sharp as Caleb Stout, formally a printer's 'devil.' To tell the p'inted truth, the Stouts allers was uncommon smart people—me in particular. They talked of sendin' me to college, when I worked out that terrible hard puzzle, which says:

'Brothers and sisters I have none,
But the prisoner's father is my father's son.'

"But here I've forgot the cipher which I'm agoin' to read out loud, jest to hear how it sounds."

He picked up his paper, and, holding it at arm's length beyond the lamp, read:

"She will not fail us. At one-twenty-one Crosby, she lives. I—"

"Yes," said Caleb, laying the papers on the table, "it wor time to stop. I wish you'd went on, you sneaking circumstance. But never mind; I know enough to take me to Crosby Street, the blessed to-morrow. Mr. Travers agoin' away, an' that lawyer—Heaven bless him fur promisin' to help us!—will take care of Opal till I come back. I'll let him into the secret some day; but I want to find who lives in that 'ere street, myself."

Without further reflections, Caleb pocketed the cipher and its solution, with a light heart, undressed, humming his favourite tune, and sought his couch.

Once in the silent watches of that night the ideas of his dreams bubbled to his lips.

"I've beat you, at last, Mr. Garbrashi! Ha, ha, ha!" he cried, and a smile came to his lips. Was it prophecy, or a never-to-be-realised dream?

CHAPTER XI.

Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
And ne'er a true one. *Shakespeare.*

WHEN Caleb returned home he announced to Opal his intention of going to London. At first, in the absence of her uncle, she objected, but when Caleb intimated that his visit had something to do with the disputed property she acquiesced in his departure.

Now the present was Caleb's first visit to London; but he was not lost when he saw nothing but lamps and splendid buildings. He was entirely ignorant of the situation of the thoroughfares, and, determined not to trust to his ingenuity, he inquired the way to Crosby Street.

"You are in Crosby Street," replied the policeman. "The dickens I am. Where shall I look for number one-twenty-one?"

"On the other side," answered the policeman.

Caleb hurried down the street, watching the numbers on the buildings.

"One-twenty-three, one-twenty-one," he laconically soliloquised, and suddenly paused before a three-storied house.

Light streamed from many of the windows, but some were dark and cheerless.

"Now I'm in a fix, ain't I?" he said, aloud. "Here I am, an' don't know the name, age, or anything about the woman I want to see. Hello! I've got it!" he exclaimed, after a brown study. "I'll ax for the female what Garbrashi comes to see, for, of course, he does when he comes to London."

Thus maturing a resolution, he stepped up to the door, and rapped loudly.

A woman opened the door.

"What d'ye want?" she inquired.

"I want to see the lady what a young man comes to see."

"Does ye mane Miss Wayward?"

"Yes," said Caleb, at a venture.

"Well, go upstairs, an' the fust door to the right."

He bounded up the stairs.

A minute later brought him to the "fust door to the right," which he unceremoniously opened, and stalked into the room.

A half-shriek greeted his entrance, and a woman shrank to the farther end of the apartment.

"Do not be alarmed," he said, kindly, taking possession of a chair and laying his hat on the floor.

"I thought I'd come in without notice. If I'd

a-knocked, you'd have locked the door, an' wouldn't a-let me in."

His words reassured the woman, who was very handsome, and about twenty-eight years of age. She timidly came forward and mechanically dropped into an arm-chair near the fire.

"What do you want with me?" she asked, eyeing Caleb.

"I'm a-lookin' for a lost sister," was the strange reply. "An' I heard of you, an' I thought as how you might be Phyllis. So I jist came from River View to see."

"River View?" cried the girl, for girlish features she still possessed. "River View?" she repeated, and her face flushed with expectation.

"Yes," said Caleb, "you must have heard of the place."

"I have," she answered; "he lives there."

"He? Who's he?"

"Leoni Garbrashi."

Caleb smiled, but she did not notice it. She was the person he sought.

"Oh, yes, he lives with us," Caleb said. "He seems to think a sight of somebody in this town. You see I'm working for Garbrashi, an' he's sent me here on business. That sister business is all a sham. I used it for an excuse to get to you. Now, see here, as I'm interested in the case—I'm an important witness, you see—I want to know what you're goin' to swear to."

Hirble Wayward did not doubt him, and she answered, straightforwardly:

"I shall swear that I was present when Arnold Travers bargained with my brother for the abduction of his pretended niece."

"How old were you then?"

"Eight years."

"Now look here," said Caleb, lowering his voice. "Is that all gammon, like mine's to be, or is it truth?"

Hirble's head dropped upon her bosom, and Caleb watched her narrowly. The question was direct and could not be avoided, and, after a long and terrible mental battle, she did not avoid it.

"I shall swear to the truth," she said, in a tremulous voice.

"Yes," said Caleb, a moment later. "Leoni loves somebody, an' he'll marry her after a while."

"Who does he love?" she asked, and her heart beat with the force of a sledge-hammer.

"Well, I don't like to say; but I'll tell you. He jist loves no one else than Miss Ruby Travers, an' when she gits the View there'll be an' outrageous big weddin'."

"What!" cried the girl, springing across the room, and suddenly pausing with pale countenance. "He love her? Why, sir, he loves me—me, Hirble Wayward."

"Well, it don't look that 'ere way to me. I tell yer, Hirble, I ken see some things."

"Give me proof!" she cried. "Proof of what you speak."

"Not now, miss," said Caleb. "I want to see you again."

"And I want to see you. Do not tell him of your visit to me. Watch him, watch him. Yes, come again."

She turned away, and without another word Caleb glided from the room.

"Heavens, what if he speaks the truth!" she moaned, burying her face in her hands. "What if he means to betray me with this great sin upon my heart! What will I do then? Die? Yes, I can die, die, die!"

Caleb hurried down the steps.

"He's made her his tool," he muttered, "and because she loves him she's goin' to swear to a lie, which will beat Opal's case. By George! she sha'n't be witness at the trial. She sha'n't, if I have to steal her from him! I'll circumnavigate him yet. Yes, I'll call agin'."

He gained the street, and sought the station.

From a house opposite, a man watched Caleb walk away.

"That's the fellow he's afraid of," the man murmured. "Tall, smooth face, and wears a beaver. Yes, that's him. I'll tell Leoni that he's been here."

Yes, Caleb was under espionage.

CHAPTER XII.

Hope is a lover's staff; walk hence with that, And manage it against despairing thoughts.

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

On the night that succeeded Arnold Travers's departure Opal found herself alone in the garden. Vincent Anderson had returned to London to prepare for the swiftly approaching battle. He had assured her, ere his departure, that he was confident of ultimate success. But she did not know that he based his belief upon one single hope—the success of her uncle's mission. The young lawyer believed that Travers would find the witnesses he sought—and that their testimony would overthrow any plain-

tiffs could bring against them.

Opal, as she wandered among the flowers that balmy May night, with the bright stars above, and the fresh green grass beneath her feet, felt no longer oppressed with the doubts which had burdened her. The young lawyer's words had chased the last lingering uncertainty away. She honoured him for becoming their defender—"their" her heart said, for her fortunes were linked with her uncle's. Perhaps she over-rated Vincent Anderson's legal ability, for she wholly relied upon it for success. He would prove a bulwark, she thought, which enemies could not overcome.

Then she thought of something else. For what had he undertaken their cause? What reward did he expect to receive after the battle had been fought, and the victory won? Ay, what reward? What should she give him? Money, she thought, would be a poor remuneration for such noble services as his. But what had she else to offer? A hand—a heart.

Her heart leaped into her throat at the thought, and her fingers suddenly, readily broke the lily from its delicate stem.

Would he accept of her heart?

The look he bestowed upon her when he promised to become her champion told her that that gift alone would he accept. Yes, she believed that he loved her, and—she loved him.

While the thoughts which the pen has recorded above were flitting through Opal's mind a step greeted her ear, and, looking up, she beheld Garbrashi approaching.

The Genoese stood high in Opal's confidence. He stood high, too, in the confidence of Arnold Travers, as the reader has seen. His dark treachery was known to none of the inmates of the mansion save Caleb Stout.

Opal greeted him with a smile, and together they rambled among the flowers and the dew.

"Miss Opal," suddenly said the secretary, "would you like to meet this Ruby—Ruby Travers, you know, she calls herself."

"You have divined my thoughts," said Opal, who had taken but little part in the conversation. "I was just thinking of her. Yes, I should like to meet her. But how can I?"

"I think she might be persuaded to come to the View during your uncle's absence," said the Genoese, who had planned everything before he broached the subject.

"What! do you think she would come here?" exclaimed Opal, looking up into Garbrashi's face.

"I think she would. You know she could come up in the morning and return at night."

"True."

"I have heard that she bears you no ill will," resumed Garbrashi, "and I am certain that an interview would be mutually pleasant. If you will agree to one in the mansion, I will promise to escort the new heiress hither."

"You, Garbrashi?"

"Yes."

"What! are you acquainted with her?"

"No. But I flatter myself that I possess all the cunning of the Italian, and that I can bring the lady to River View within forty-eight hours. When would it please you to meet her?"

"The day after to-morrow," Opal answered, smiling. "But I do not think she will come."

"I am quite certain of the success of my plans," said Garbrashi. "I will go to London to-morrow. You know she can come up alone—I meeting her at Rosedale with the carriage."

"I cheerfully accede to everything, Garbrashi. My curiosity is great to see my fair rival; but I will freely confess that I shall look for the utter failure of your plans."

"Time ends all disputes," laughed the Genoese, clipping a rose with his cane. "You shall see if I do not succeed. I never fail in cherished undertakings."

Half an hour later they returned to the house, and fought a great battle with the chessmen.

Ruby checkmated her opponent.

"You've checkmated me, as sure as fate!" he cried, resigning her the board and dashing from the room. "But, confound me! if I don't checkmate you, Arnold Travers, Vincent Anderson, and Caleb, yet. Yes, Ruby will come here, and she will fill Opal's mind with terrible doubts. Ruby's arm is all right now. When she is gone, Opal Travers will believe her the true heiress, and herself her 'uncle's' tool."

Thus he spoke when he reached his room, and a few minutes later he was asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

A happy lot be thine, and larger flight
Await thee there; for thou hast bound thy will
In cheerful homage to the rule of right,
And lovest all, and doest good for ill.

Bryant.

NEXT morning Leoni Garbrashi departed for London. He returned early in the evening, and informed

Opal that his plans had worked admirably and that Ruby would make her appearance on the coming day.

Opal was pleased at the prospect of gratifying her curiosity, and she warmly thanked the secretary for his services. She had one great motive in seeing Ruby, her rival. She thought she could persuade her to give up the contest, which had at last reached the columns of the local newspapers. She felt convinced it could but result in Ruby's ruin, and the ruin of those who espoused her cause.

With feverish anxiety Opal awaited the arrival of the great day.

With the revolution of the wheel of time it came, and, from her boudoir, she saw the Genoese assist a young lady from the carriage. Vincent Anderson followed her.

Opal was surprised to see the lawyer, for he was not expected at the View, and she could not think what had brought him there, and with her too.

They entered the house, and Opal proceeded with her toilette.

In the hall a servant relieved Ruby of her hat and cloak, and the lawyer escorted her into the parlour.

We should say here that Anderson knew nothing of Ruby's visit to her rival until he encountered her that morning in the train. He was on his way to River View on business connected with his newly espoused cause.

Arrived in the parlour, Ruby seated herself upon a sofa, and rested her feet upon an ottoman. She looked very beautiful that balmy morning. Her hair was combed back and secured by pins, and her countenance was fresh and beamed with life. She was dressed in white, and no ornaments glistened on her person save a bracelet which encircled her left wrist.

For some moments the lawyer conversed with her on topics foreign to the great question at issue, when he rose and told her that he would have Opal informed of her arrival.

Ruby replied, with smiles, that she was ready to meet her rival, and the lawyer had touched the handle of the door when she spoke his name.

Dropping his hand, he turned round and confronted her. Resting one hand upon the table, he waited for her to speak.

"Mr. Anderson," she said, gazing up into his face, "must I regard your expressed decision as final?"

"Yes," he answered, without hesitation. "The cause which I have espoused shall not be championless."

"I am sorry," she said, "very sorry. We had counted upon your assistance. I am ready to offer you gold for your services."

"Gold cannot buy me," he answered. "Therefore, Miss Travers, I must decline your offer."

She looked at him coldly and reproachfully, but he did not speak.

For several moments a deathlike silence filled the room, while look encountered look; Ruby was about to speak, when the door opened almost noiselessly, and Opal glided into the room.

The lawyer noted the quick look which Ruby threw beyond him, and, having heard the door open, he divined its import.

Hastily stepping aside, he performed the ceremony of introduction, and the hands of the rivals met for the first time.

Ruby put on her sweetest smile when she met Opal, and a look of pity might have been seen in Opal's eyes, for she thought:

"This beautiful creature is the tool of base, conspiring people."

In another moment she had led her rival to the sofa, and the lawyer had vanished.

"I am so glad that you have come," said Opal, when reserve had disappeared. "I have longed to see you—my rival."

"Yes, we are rivals," answered Ruby. "I wish I could get my estate peaceably. But my uncle seems determined to fight—for a cause which he knows is wrong."

"What!" cried Opal. "Do you really believe that you are the true heiress? Poor girl, you have been fearfully deceived!"

"Fearfully deceived!" echoed Ruby, with a laugh; "I have not been deceived, but you have. Ah, I pity you, dear Opal, from the bottom of my heart. Soon you will be a beautiful, houseless wanderer, and all through Arnold Travers, not me. Opal, before Heaven, I am the true heiress to this mansion. I bear upon my arm the title to my legal rights."

"You!" exclaimed Opal, gazing at Ruby's hand, which was unbuttoning her sleeve. "My arm bears the crescent cross."

"Yes, he put it there when he blighted your parents' lives," said Ruby. "The same hand that tattooed me in the presence of my father tattooed you for my uncle's gold. Upon your arm he put a private mark."

"How know you all this?"

"The tattooer still lives. He is one of my most important witnesses."

As Ruby spoke she drew her sleeve up, and displayed, to Opal's astonishment, the black device upon the whitest skin.

"There's my title to River View," said Ruby, triumphantly. "There's the crescent cross, with its cabalistic figures, which say that I was born on the sixth day of the first month, January, 1847. Now, Opal, please let me see your arm, and I will show you the sailor's private mark. It is a little cross below the large one. The sailor thinks yours must have faded, as the ink used upon it was of an inferior quality."

"She speaks the truth," murmured Opal, almost faint, as she displayed her beautifully and faintly moulded arm to the gaze of her rival.

"There," said Ruby, touching Opal's crescent cross, which had faded with time. "See, the 'six' is almost obliterated, but the little cross, his private mark, is quite distinct. It has been preserved to right a great wrong, to secure justice a triumph in the end."

Slowly and with trembling fingers, Opal lowered her sleeve, and her rival watched her with concealed triumph.

She knew what terrible doubts filled the poor girl's mind, and she hastened to turn them into beliefs by relating a well-planned story of wrong.

Opal did not interrupt her. The device upon the arm had altered her belief. She had thought that no one in the world save herself and her uncle knew of the existence of the little cross. Yes, the tattooer did know, but her uncle had lately told her that he was dead. But he could not be dead, she thought now, for Ruby said that he lived, and who else could have told her of the little cross?

Oh, she wished that she had never seen the light of day! In one moment she believed her uncle the veriest wretch on earth, and the next, when she recalled his kindness to her, she could not hate him.

If he was not her uncle, he had deserved the appellation, and as such she would recognise him, come what was in store for both.

To sum up all, Opal believed that Ruby was the true heiress, and when her uncle should return she would entreat him to surrender the View, and flee the country, where the vengeance of the veiled woman, whoever she was, could not reach him.

By-and-bye Opal left the room with a heavy heart, and sent the Genoise into the parlour to entertain her visitor.

The secretary noticed her countenance before he left her in the hall.

"She hates herself," he muttered, in his native tongue. "She will abandon Arnold Travers when he returns."

At the dinner-table various topics were discussed, and the hour passed pleasantly to all save the heavy-hearted girl.

In the afternoon she sought a conversation with the lawyer, who requested her to postpone her account of the interview with Ruby till the following day.

He saw she was troubled.

"Caleb and I are going to London to-night," he said. "I shall return to-morrow, with information that will secure the success of our cause. Caleb has told me something. Cheer up, Opal. Let nothing she may have told you oppress your heart. Caleb has not been idle."

Thus he spoke, but she was not reassured.

He built his beliefs on brittle hopes she thought. She was not Opal Travers, and she felt that she would soon be a houseless wanderer.

In the evening she bade Ruby farewell. Caleb and the lawyer did not depart till an hour later.

CHAPTER XIV.

Attempt this end, and never stand in doubt;
Nothing's so hard but search will find it out.

Herrick.

VINCENT ANDERSON had a reason for departing so hastily to London, which was this:

When he left the parlour, after introducing Opal to her rival he strolled out on the lawn, where he encountered Caleb Stout, who seemed to have just returned from a journey, whistling as he came.

Caleb had not intended to mention the result of his mission to London when he returned to River View.

For the present, he had resolved to be his own counsellor, and not entrust his discovery to others. He was firmly impressed with the belief that Hirble Wayward had sworn to perjure herself, and that her testimony would terribly damage Opal's cause.

He had determined that she should not come forward as a witness, and he had set his wits to work to form a plan by which he could prevent her appearance at the trial.

But the more Caleb cogitated about Hirble Wayward the more firmly he became convinced that he wanted assistance in carrying out his plans. When

he saw the lawyer snatching over the lawn it struck him that he knew of no better assistant, so he decided to tell the young disciple of Blackstone everything.

"Mr. Anderson," said Caleb, suddenly, after the lawyer had apostrophised the weather, "I've got somethin' to tell you. Jest you step into the master's room along with me—there's nobody likely to interrupt us there now, an' I'll out with the whole on it."

The lawyer thought that Caleb had made a discovery regarding the dispute which had arisen, and readily followed him.

There Caleb unbosomed himself to the lawyer. He told him of the meeting at the boat-house which he had witnessed, showed him two rolls of paper, one of which was the half-finished cipher, and the other his solution of it, and gave a succinct account of his visit to Hirble Wayward.

To all this the lawyer listened with astonishment. He admired Caleb's shrewdness and deeply appreciated his worth.

"You must go back with me to London immediately," said Vincent.

"But we cannot go before night."

"You are right, Caleb. We will go then. Hirble Wayward must not testify falsely against us. I am confident that she is to be a perjured witness."

"In course she is."

"We must tell her that Leoni Garbrashi is a traitor to his oaths, that when the trial is ended he will throw her aside and marry Ruby. I do not doubt that she will not allow us to secrete her until after the twenty-fifth of June; or perhaps she may be induced to expose the conspiracy in court."

"That's jest what I'm thinkin' of," said Caleb. "That'd do the best. She'll do that, I'll bet on it."

Shortly after the interview ended, and the twain left River View in the evening.

The Genoise smiled sardoniously when he saw them depart.

"Now for a wild-goose chase," he said, looking after them.

Arrived in the great city, Caleb had no difficulty in leading the lawyer to Crosby Street.

"Here's the house," said Caleb, stopping up to the door. "Now jest stand on one side, Mr. Anderson, an' I'll carry on the negotiations with the women."

The lawyer obeyed, and the next instant Caleb's great fist struck the door.

It was opened by Mrs. Bridget O'Connor.

"What does ye want agin?" she asked, recognising Caleb.

"We want to see the young woman."

"We'l who's we?" cried Mrs. O'Connor, who always thought that "we" meant a blue-coated policeman.

"Me an' a lawyer what has some bizness with the young woman," said Caleb.

"Ye'll hev to look in another house fur the ledgy," said the woman.

"What?" said Anderson, suddenly appearing on the step. "Do you say, my good lady, that Miss Wayward has left your house?"

"An' I say nothing else, may it please your honour," Mrs. O'Connor said.

"When did she leave, and who went with her?" inquired the lawyer.

"She went last night, an' who should take her away than the person what brought her here an' paid her rent like a gentleman, as he is?"

"Do you know where she went?"

"Do you s'pose t' be the likes of Mrs. O'Connor to inquire into a gentleman's business?"

The lawyer and Caleb exchanged looks.

"We would like to see her room, Mrs. O'Connor," said Vincent.

"In course ye may say it, an' if it'll do ye any good to peep in at Mrs. O'Friminens an' her twelve children, the last one but a week old, ye's welcome."

Our friends were decidedly averse to doing anything of the kind, but they thought that Mrs. O'Connor might be deceiving them.

"We will see the room," said the lawyer.

"An' that man will show ye up," said the woman, nodding at Caleb. "He's bin here afore."

She opened the door to its widest capacity, and presently our friends stood in the narrow passage above.

Caleb soon found the door which had admitted him to the presence of her whom they now sought. Turning the handle, he threw the door open, and they beheld a squalid sight.

A tallow candle threw a sickly light around the wretched apartment, which contained a mother and twelve half-clad children, whose ages ranged from one to twelve years. The floor was literally covered with filth, and an unpleasant odour greeted the nostrils of our friends. The children shrieked, and clung, terror-stricken, to their emaciated mother, whose eyes glared like a tigress upon the faces at the door.

"Come, Caleb," cried the lawyer, "she is not there."

Caleb closed the door, and they hastily quitted the house.

"Well, Caleb, Garbrashi has baffled us," said Vincent, calmly, when they stood on the pavement again. "You have been watched. He has had a suspicion of you. Spies have dogged your footsteps, and your visit to Hirble Wayward has been made known to him. But she must be found."

"Mr. Anderson, you speak jest right. She not only must, but she shall be found! Confound me, if I don't hound his steps an' foller him to her! He has taken her to another part of the city. That's jest what the dog has done. He shan't leave the View, unless I'm at his heels. I kin play the spy as well as his fellers kin, an' if he beats me, then lose my hat! I'm goin' back to-night. Are you goin'?"

"No, Caleb. Tell Opal that I will be there to-morrow. But do not tell her about our trip. I must do that. Watch that dog—the Genoise, I mean. When Travers returns the traitor shall be unmasked. Good night."

Then they separated.

"Well, Garbrashi's got the best of me," muttered Caleb. "But he won't in the long run—he won't."

(To be continued.)

TRESSILIAN COURT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A Life at Stake," "The House of Secrets," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XVII.

JASPER LOWDER slept well on that first night of his stay at Tressilian Court. No haunting memories came to agitate his soul, or to frighten repose from his eyelids. No remembrance of the true Guy Tressilian languishing in a foreign land, far from home, father and friends, the victim of an appalling malady, disturbed him. Nor did he think of the mysterious "Mrs. Hester Lowder," at Manich. His past, as he had said, was indeed buried from his sight. Would it ever arise in a fearful resurrection to confront him?

Blanche was alone in the breakfast room the next morning, leaning carelessly against a closed glazed door looking upon the now desolate flower-garden.

In her long morning-dress of white piqué, quite suitable in that well-warmed house for the chill November weather, she looked very fair and dainty. A knot of blue ribbons confined her narrow collar, and blue ribbons were loosely tied among her golden curls. She was looking thoughtfully at the diamond ring Lowder had given her, which the true Guy had bought for her, turning it slowly to catch the rays of light.

Her guardian came in at that moment and approached her.

"Good-morning, Blanche," he said, lightly. "A penny for your thoughts."

"My thoughts were not worth the sum you offer," she said, smiling.

Sir Arthur passed his hand caressingly over her golden tresses with a fatherly touch. It was with a benevolent, fatherly smile he looked down into the lovely upturned face.

"Well, my little Blanche," he said, pleasantly. "How does the real Guy compare with the ideal?"

The girl's flower-like face drooped.

"Why, guardy, I—I hardly know," she said, in a sudden confusion, the colour in her cheeks deepening. "He is handsome and gentle and polished. He is a finer gentleman than we have about here. I mean, that his manners seem foreign and distinguished."

"Is that an attraction?" asked Sir Arthur. "Give me the quiet, old-fashioned English simplicity and politeness. I don't care for foreign 'airs and graces.' Not that I am not pleased with Guy. He does not ape foreign follies, if his manners are slightly foreign. I am charmed with him. He seems to realise all my brightest hopes. He has preserved his old warm-heartedness, as witness his greetings to Mrs. Goss and Purinton. It is not in his nature to forget even the humblest of his friends. He seems to be indeed a noble fellow!"

Blanche's face glowed, as if under personal praise.

"Poor Guy!" she murmured. "What strange adventures he has had. It was almost a miracle his life being saved in that terrible shipwreck. Oh, guardy, what if it had been our Guy who had met that terrible injury on the Sicilian coast!" she shuddered. "It comes back to me now and then, that fearful thought: what if it had been our Guy who was rendered an idiot!"

"The idea has come to me also a hundred times," returned Sir Arthur. "That poor young Lowder! Alone in the world, blighted as a tree is blighted by the lightning—dead in life! Poor, poor lad! A merciful Providence has spared us the grief of losing our Guy in that manner. I can see that my son mourns

for his friend. We must love Guy 'for the dangers he has passed,' little Blanche. He told me last night how he admires you. He has come home heart-free, as I expected. But I fancy he will not be heart-free long, if he is so now," the baronet added, with a faint smile. He turned away from the girl with a sudden choking at his throat.

Blanche bent again over her ring, looking into the liquid diamond as earnestly as if it were a magician's fabled crystal, and held imprisoned the secret of her future.

At this juncture the door opened, and Lowder entered the apartment. Sir Arthur went forward and greeted the impostor with an affectionate manner.

Lowder had attired himself in Parisian morning costume. He was secretly as fond of dress as any fashionable young lady, and for the first time in his life had an extensive and varied wardrobe. His faultless, lavender-coloured suit well became him. His necktie was a marvel of delicate hues and tasteful arrangement. The odour of some dainty perfume floated from the folds of his cambric handkerchief. His only jewellery was a massive watch chain, and a seal ring worn on the little finger of his left hand.

He conducted himself easily and gracefully, replied to the baronet's salutation with an apparent answering affection, and greeted Blanche with a tender warmth. The butler and his assistants entering, Sir Arthur led the way to the breakfast-table. Lowder exerted himself to please, and became almost immediately the life of the group. Some question or remark of the baronet's brought up some incident of Lowder's travels, and he related it in a manner that charmed his listeners. The interest of Sir Arthur and Blanche was rivalled by that of good, portly old Purton, who stood motionless at his buffet, apparently absorbed in the contemplation of silver and crystal, but actually entranced by the narrative, told in a style that secretly disgusted him with his own often-told tales.

"It's education that does it," thought the old butler, admiringly. "But Master Guy always had a talent for story-telling. There wasn't nothing but he could turn his mind to."

The trio lingered at the table a half-hour or more, then proceeded to a pretty morning parlour, Sir Arthur leading the way.

The weather was but little better than that of the preceding day. The storm had cleared, but the sky was gloomy and lowering, heavy with dull-looking clouds. There was a strong November wind whistling through the trees and ruffling the waters of the river, which beat against its embankment with a sullen roar.

The trees bordering the avenue and dotting the lawn were stripped and bare, and the dead leaves went skurrying through the air like troops of brown birds in the fitful gusts.

Lowder, tired of monopolising the conversation, and desirous of extending his acquaintance with the estate of Tressilian Court, went to the window and surveyed the extensive lawn and the fretting river.

These views fired him with a desire to see more. He wished to behold the prize for which he had sold himself—the entire estate, or as much of it as might be seen in a morning ramble.

"The weather is not so very bad," he observed. "It is windy and chilly and gloomy, it is true, but it is real English November weather. What do you say, Blanche, to a stroll with me about the grounds? I am impatient to see what changes have been made about the place in my absence."

"It will do you good, Blanche," said the baronet. "The rain kept you indoors yesterday; you need the fresh air."

"You must go too, guardy," replied Blanche, pleased with the prospect of a ramble.

Sir Arthur assented, and his ward flitted from the room to prepare herself for the walk.

She was absent but a few minutes, returning fully equipped. She had exchanged her house slippers for dainty little kid boots, with thick soles and high heels that clicked like hammers on the hall floor. Her white dress was exchanged for a pretty blue dress, which was looped up over her skirts; a white lamb's-wool sacque, and a coquettish little hat completed her costume. She looked very fair and childlike as she entered, her golden hair floating over her shoulders in curls as Sir Arthur liked best to see it, her eyes beaming, her cheeks glowing.

Her escorts were ready and waiting, and Blanche flew on before them, leading the way from the house to the lawn.

"The river first," she said, gaily. "I know how any such feature about one's home must stand out in the memory above all others. I presume Guy has never thought of the Court except in connection with the river."

"It has always been the most prominent feature of our home scenery in my mind," declared the impostor, with affected ardour. "The dear old Severn,

In childhood I sported on its banks, in boyhood I rowed over its waters. I hope to spend my manhood close beside it, and to lay my bones near it when old age is passed. You are right, Blanche, in thinking that a feature like this river must stand out in the memory. We read of the 'house by the sea,' the 'cottage by the brook side,' the 'home by the river,' and it seems an established fact that water gives a charm to a home that can be equalled by nothing save mountains. This is the river that in my boyhood was the grandest of all rivers to me."

They had reached the little pier, and Lowder gazed upon the turbulent waters with seeming enthusiasm. The baronet and Blanche were silent. They could not break the charm of a communion such as they supposed the young man to be experiencing with the scenes of his boyhood.

"We shall have fine sailing and rowing here next summer," remarked Lowder, after a pause. "The river seems unchanged, the houses and gardens on its banks are like an often-seen picture. How familiar that yellow stone villa looks on the opposite side of the river! I remember it well. I have often laughed at the remembrance of its absurd cockney style of architecture."

He paused, encountering a look from both his auditors of the most undisguised astonishment.

He comprehended instantly that he had made a terrible mistake—his first blunder—and a cold damp gathered on his forehead.

His anxiety was not lessened when Sir Arthur said, wonderingly:

"Guy, that house has not been built two years. Its owner is a recently retired London merchant. How then can you have remembered it, and laughed at its architecture?"

The impostor knew not how to reply. A dozen answers rose to his lips, but not one of them would have excused his statement. His eyes fell before the steady, astonished gaze of the baronet, and he looked helplessly at Blanche.

The maiden was filled with pity for him. She found ready explanations for his singular mistake, and turned to Sir Arthur, whispering:

"Dear guardy, it must be the effect of that injury he told us of, or the consequence of his illness. Let us appear not to notice the weakness of his memory."

The baronet bowed assent. Lowder, who had heard the whispered words, now took heart again, and said:

"I must have seen a house somewhere like that, for it certainly looked very familiar for the moment. My head is not quite right, I think. There is a house, my dear father," he added, indicating one up the stream that was most undeniably old, "that I know I have seen before. Who lives there?"

Sir Arthur looked at Lowder intently, but without a shadow of suspicion.

"Try and think, Guy," he said, kindly. "You have spent many happy hours with the inmates of that house. The sons of its owner were your intimate and inseparable friends. Can you not remember their names?"

The impostor found himself in a worse dilemma than before. He became red and pale by turns, and stood the picture of confusion.

"I—I can't remember!" he stammered.

"Yet you remembered not only me at once but the old butler," said Sir Arthur, gravely. "You knew Mrs. Goss at once, remembering her by her kindness to you in your childhood. You must have as strong associations in your mind with these boy neighbours, whom you loved as if they were your brothers?"

"It is very curious," said Lowder, with an expression that seemed to show an effort to remember. "I've heard the name—I mean, I know it. If I were back at the Court, I could tell you instantly;" and he thought of the little note-book he carried in his pocket—the one he had stolen from Guy—but which he dared not open now. "It is easier to remember there than here," he added, explanatorily. "It is so singular that the name should have escaped me."

"You can at least remember the name of the young lady who lives in the house you have remarked?" asked Sir Arthur. "She was rowing with you on this river once, and the boat was upset, you know. You saved her life, almost at the expense of your own, and you have a mark on your arm to this day to remember that adventure by. Your arm was cut—you certainly remember how?"

"Certainly," stammered Lowder, not knowing in what way to reply, moving his arms uneasily.

"You must remember the cause of that mark? You said more than once that you should always associate it, and not disagreeably, with Miss—Now, what is her name?"

Sir Arthur waited eagerly for a response.

Lowder again racked his memory for the missing name. He knew the story of that rescue, having heard it from Guy, and the name of its heroine was

almost at his tongue's end. It eluded him strangely; he thought, inwardly muttering curses upon it and upon his questioner.

At last, in utter desperation, he leaned forward towards Blanche, whispering:

"The name! the name! Help me, Blanche."

Pitying him, believing him, the maiden answered, in a whisper:

"Egerton. Colonel Egerton."

The impostor breathed freely. His memory had stirred itself at that name. He had seen it many times in Guy's note-book, and he answered, confidently:

"How stupid I was to forget so entirely the names of people I once knew so well! The house belongs to Colonel Egerton, father. His two sons, Fred and Will, were my boyish friends. His daughter, Mary, is associated with the mark on my arm."

Both the baronet and Blanche smiled a pleased assent.

"Your memory will strengthen rapidly here," said Sir Arthur. "We must not forget, my dear Guy, how recently you have suffered a terrible injury to your brain. You shall not be annoyed more than I can help with calls from people you have forgotten. I had not realised till this moment that your memory really had weakened. In a few weeks, my boy, I trust you will feel well enough to meet your old friends and acquaintances, and to establish yourself on your old footing in the community."

The young man expressed his gratitude at the baronet's kind consideration for his present weakness, and assented to his plans for the future.

"Come, guardy, we must not linger longer by the river side," said Blanche, moving away. "The river is guarded by a host of unpleasant little imps, of the families of chills and fevers. Let us go to the garden. By the way, Guy, do you remember the gardener, old Luke?"

"Remember him?" said Lowder, with a laugh. "He is enshrined in my remembrance by the side of good Mrs. Goss. I shall be glad to see the old fellow."

Blanche led the way, dancing lightly over the damp, green sward, her pretty feet peeping out from beneath her snowy skirts as she turned now and then and ran backward, like a merry child, her sunny hair, in all its massy wealth, floating on the wind like a bright cloud.

Lowder looked at her admiringly, with already a lover-like delight.

Sir Arthur dared not look at her at all.

"How beautiful she is!" said Lowder.

The baronet murmured an affirmative response.

Lowder looked curiously at his averted face, his keen wit instantly comprehending the state of the baronet's feelings, and exulting because the coveted prize was in his grasp, and must be for ever beyond the reach of Sir Arthur.

He had determined to woo Blanche, in face of every obstacle, to be his wife.

He feared nothing from the baronet's rivalry. He knew instinctively that Sir Arthur would unselfishly prefer his ward's and his supposed son's happiness to his own. Yet Blanche was a richer prize in his eyes because the baronet loved her.

"This is the garden," said Blanche, pausing at last in the gravel walks of the flower-garden, which now was dull and flowerless as in winter. "Not very delightful, is it? Now, Guy," she added, roughly, "you said you remembered old Luke, the gardener, perfectly. Probably you remember his assistants, too. There is an old man yonder, planting or transplanting, I think, who would be delighted if you would call to him."

She indicated an old, gray-haired man, who was stooping near a flower-bed at no great distance, yet quite unconscious of their proximity.

Sir Arthur was about to speak, but Blanche, bright and wilful, put her finger to her rosy mouth, enjoining silence.

"Now, Guy," said the little maiden, "call to him."

"But I don't remember him," said Lowder, knitting his brows in perplexity. "Because I remember the gardener, it does not follow that I remember his assistants."

"But you do remember the gardener?" queried Blanche.

"Certainly. I remember him perfectly. Where is he?"

Blanche laughed merrily. Sir Arthur looked uneasy.

With the quickness of a flash, Lowder comprehended the cause of Sir Arthur's uneasiness. Blanche was testing his "memory"—playing off a practical joke upon him.

For a moment a savage indignation against her swelled his heart. Then, composing his perplexed countenance, he said, lightly:

"Don't tell me, Blanche! Wait till he lifts his head,

and turns his face this way. I cannot yet see his features distinctly."

At this juncture the old gardener, who was potting some of his choicest plants for the greenhouse, looked up, turning a wrinkled, seamed old face towards the group.

Lowder uttered an exclamation.

"Why, it's old Luke himself!" he ejaculated. "The old fellow hasn't changed in a single feature—not even in a wrinkle—since I saw him last!"

Blanche gave utterance to a low, bird-like laugh. Sir Arthur looked relieved and pleased.

"My dear Guy," he said, "this weakness of your memory is quite capricious. It will not cause you serious inconvenience. A few days of quiet and rest, with Blanche and me to take care of you, and you will be yourself again. Your memory of your travels is absolutely perfect. But old Luke is looking wistfully at you, and expects a greeting, as he is the oldest retainer on the estate, and you were always his favourite."

Quite at his ease now, Lowder advanced towards the old gardener, who was intently staring at him, and held out his white, perfumed hand with an affectation of frankness.

"How are you, Luke, old fellow?" he said, in a jovial tone. "I was just saying you hadn't changed a bit since I went away."

Old Luke took the proffered hand in his, first rubbing his own against his garments. Then, with a countenance working with emotion, he looked full in the face of the supposed heir of Tressilian Court.

He was a very old man, properly long past his working days. He had been chief gardener at Tressilian Court in the time of Sir Arthur's grandfather, and had clung to his post since, although as years came on, burdening him with their weight, his duties became merely nominal. There was a younger gardener, with more modern ideas, and actually chief in his department, but old Luke retained his old rate of wages, his old picturesque cottage in the park, his old privileges, and busied himself in potting, transplanting, and ordering, quite in the old way, never dreaming that he was old-fashioned and superannuated. Sir Arthur was a man of fine feelings and genuine delicacy, and he made the worn old gardener believe himself indispensable in his place.

Old Luke being, therefore, a privileged character, it was not to be wondered at that he clung to Lowder's hand, looking with bleared eyes into the fair, calm face smiling down upon him.

"But you have changed, Master Guy!" he said, in a tremulous voice. "You have changed greatly! So you are my bright, handsome Guy, my noble, frank-hearted lad? It don't seem possible!"

"You forget that years and sickness and travel must change one, Luke," said Sir Arthur, kindly. "My son went away a boy. He comes back a man. But he is Guy still. You will find he has the same warm heart—"

"I hope so. I hope so," muttered old Luke, a shadow of discontent creeping into his faded eyes as he looked wistfully up into the usurper's face. "It's all right, Sir Arthur. But till this moment I never realised that I had lost my boy. In place of the boy has come a man—"

"Whom I hope you will like as well as the thoughtless lad, Luke," said Lowder. "I can't afford to lose any of my old friendships, least of all yours."

He spoke with an apparent sincerity that still farther warmed the hearts of Blanche and Sir Arthur towards him.

After a little further conversation with the gardener, Sir Arthur, Blanche, and Lowder strolled on, the latter inwardly congratulating himself on the presence of mind that had extricated him from an embarrassing situation.

"I must be more on my guard," he thought. "And I must drop the gushing, frank, open style, I must look out for traps of every description. I cannot be too careful for the present. There may be pitfalls where I least expect to find them."

Meanwhile the old gardener, picking up his hoe and leaning upon it, looked after the young man with a perplexed and troubled expression.

"And that is Master Guy?" he muttered. "Where are his laughing blue eyes, his gay, bright smile, his joyous voice? I s'pose it's all right. How proud Sir Arthur seemed of him! What shy, sweet looks Miss Blanche sent up into his face. I suppose Master Guy and Miss Blanche will make a match yet. They may adore him, if they want to, but not even an angel could make me believe him all right. There's something wrong about him—something false in his blue eyes, which are not so blue as they used to be; something false in his smiles; something false in his very tones! I am an old man, and I have learned to read faces. And of all the faces I ever read, this is the fairest and the falsest. Poor Sir Arthur! He'll find himself cursed in his son. There is trouble ahead for him!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

As the hour wore on after the forcible ejection of poor Guy Tressilian from the grounds of the Villa Bella Vista, still Krigger and the Sicilian coachman did not return, and Olla, watching from her upper window, grew insupportably anxious.

"What can they be doing with him?" she demanded, knitting her brows anxiously. "Why are they gone so long? They must be practising some cruelty upon him."

"Oh, they wouldn't injure a harmless creature like him," said Mrs. Popley, soothingly.

"I know they would!" cried Olla, impetuously. "I have seen Krigger torture a poor little fluttering bird which some chance threw into his hands. He is cruel enough for anything. Why didn't I think of it before?"

She opened her window, stepping out on the balcony. Mr. Gower sat on a low bench on the terrace, as guard in the absence of Krigger. He looked up, as Olla appeared, and made her a mocking bow.

"Well, my dear," he asked, "have you relented? Do you wish me to come up to your room?"

"At your peril!" cried Olla, her eyes flashing. "I have seen enough of you, Mr. Devereux Gower. Where is Popley?"

At the mention of his name, the faithful Popley emerged from under the shadow of the balcony, showing himself to his young mistress.

"Popley," said the young girl, speaking rapidly, "to what place is Krigger taking poor Mr. Lowder?"

"Back to the Vicini cottage, Miss Olla."

"Go after them, Popley. I want to know if they are treating him well. Go at once, and see him safely in charge of Mrs. Vicini."

Popley bowed assent, and hurried away.

"You should have spoken to me on the subject, Olla," said Mr. Gower, reprovingly. "The idiot is safe. I told Krigger not to harm a hair of his head. All I desire is that the fellow shall keep out of my grounds, and out of my presence."

Having encountered her hospitalities once, he will hardly be 'idiot' enough to come again," said Olla, with sarcastic emphasis.

She turned and re-entered her room.

About a half-hour later, she beheld the return of Krigger and the Sicilian coachman. They reported themselves to their employer, who, leaving the former on guard, sauntered round an angle of the villa, disappearing from Olla's sight.

It was fully an hour later when Popley made his appearance, emerging from the shadow of the almond grove. Olla stepped out again upon the balcony, to which her faithful servitor approached as nearly as possible.

"Well?" questioned the young mistress, bending over the low, carved balustrade with an eager, flushing face. "You went to the bluff?"

"Yes, Miss Olla, to the Vicini cottage," replied Popley, in an undertone, too low for the quickened hearing of Krigger. "Mr. Lowder was unharmed. The men were not harsh with him. They ordered Mrs. Vicini to keep him at home, under penalty of removing him to a madhouse."

Olla's eyes flashed indignantly.

"The dastard!" she murmured. "Not Krigger, but Mr. Gower, whose orders Krigger obeyed. How did he—Mr. Lowder—bear it—the not seeing me, you know, Popley?"

"He took it hard, Miss Olla. He couldn't understand it, poor fellow! He sat on a rock as I climbed up the bluff, and he looked at me pitifully and wishfully, and said he, 'Olla, Olla!' in a moaning way, till my heart ached for him. When Mrs. Vicini spoke to him in her own language, with the tears in her eyes, all he said was still 'Olla, Olla!' It would have broken a heart of stone to have heard him."

Olla's generous heart panted. Her black eyes, glorious like midnight stars, shone through a sudden shower of tears.

"Poor fellow! Poor Jasper!" she said. "Popley, you must go to him every morning, and see how he fares. Perhaps he will forget me; but if he don't, try to make him understand that I cannot come to him."

Krigger coming near at this juncture, with the evident intention of overhearing the conversation between the young girl and her servitor, Olla withdrew into her room, and Popley returned to his post under the balcony, where he was still within call of his imprisoned mistress.

The day passed slowly to the lovely young prisoner; she paced her floor with a swift, impetuous tread, as a leopardess might dash to and fro in its cage. She devised a hundred plans of escape, all impracticable, and all eventually relinquished. She racked her brilliant little brain for some hopeful project, but could find none. Mr. Gower had closed every avenue to her. She was shut up in her pretty, gilded, balconied chambers, just as surely and just as securely as a prisoner is shut up in his dungeon.

At last the fact dawned upon her in all its terror and misery, that there was at present no escape for her.

She could not leave the villa in broad daylight, even could she quit her rooms. If she could manage to escape from the villa at night, she could not escape from the island in any of the steamers leaving it. Mr. Gower would be on her track too soon for that. She could appeal to no English resident of Palermo. Mr. Gower had provided against that possibility.

"But I won't give up!" cried Olla, resolutely. "I have evaded him once, and I will do it again, in spite of all the Kriggers, all the Russian hounds, and all the Sicilian allies he can procure! I have got money in plenty, enough to carry us all to England twice over, and to Kamschatka afterwards. Papa made me a generous yearly allowance in his will, you know, Mrs. Popley, and this year I have used very little of it. I was saving it to buy me a lovely Indian shawl, a beauty, you know, and so I happen to have it on hand. With plenty of money and two such friends as you and James, it would be very odd if I did not find myself equal in ability to Mr. Gower."

"I don't see how we are to get away, Miss Olla," said Mrs. Popley, "but I am ready to make the attempt. Only, if we can devise some plan, we shall have to take Jim into our confidence; and how can we do that without Krigger hearing it all?"

"Oh, I'll drop him a note over the balcony when Krigger isn't looking," answered Olla. "But we won't discuss the subject any more to-night, dear old nurse. I feel myself growing feeble-minded under this anxiety," and she smiled. "I feel as I suppose a bewildered mouse must feel when caught in a trap. It dashes first against this side, then against that, and can't get out. Only, having more wit than a mouse—it is to be charitably hoped—I intend to get out!"

Being a brave and resolute girl, Olla did not despair. Or, perhaps it was because poor Mrs. Popley's lip quivered, and her sad eyes filled with tears, that the young girl kept up a hopeful seeming. But, whatever the reason, she had never been brighter, sweeter, or tenderer than during the hours that followed her realisation of her utter powerlessness.

About dusk, Krigger brought up two lighted candles, and a tray of food, consisting of bread, wine and fruits. After he had gone, Mrs. Popley drew the curtains, and the two sat down to their supper.

After the meal, Olla brought out her work, a muffler she was knitting for Tressilian, and Mrs. Popley took up her sewing.

"There's no use in giving up and dying, because we don't see a way out of our difficulty just at present," observed Olla, philosophically. "I shall be free one of these days, nurse. I feel it in my bones."

In spite of her knowledge of Mr. Gower's character, Mrs. Popley brightened at this cheerful prophecy.

The next morning, Jim Popley, obeying the command of his young mistress, went again to the Vicini cottage. He returned about noon, reporting to Olla that Tressilian had eaten little or nothing since the previous morning, that he was very sad and silent, and that the only word he uttered was the name of Olla. He reported also that, though restless and uneasy, Tressilian made no attempt to seek again the Villa Bella Vista, or even to leave the bluff.

As may be imagined, this report caused Olla a keen anxiety and grief.

The reports on the next day and the next were almost precisely similar, the only variation being the announcements that Tressilian was wasting away with his grief, and that Mrs. Vicini was sadly distressed about him, the more so that her husband was absent on a fishing expedition, and she had no one to counsel her, the good priest having gone to Messina to be absent on a week's visit. In this strait, she begged the noble young English to come to her.

"And I cannot go!" murmured Olla. "Oh, it is terrible, terrible!"

Despite her courage and resolution, her imprisonment told upon the health and spirits of the beautiful young girl. She was growing pale and thin from want of out-of-door exercise. She was becoming subject to fits of depression, varied with fits of gaiety. Her anxiety about Tressilian weighed heavily upon her.

On the morning of the fourth day, Popley set out as usual for the pleasant little cottage of the Vicinis. The previous day had been rainy, but this was pleasant with a sort of hectic beauty. The walk was accomplished in due time, and the worthy fellow climbed the bluff, pausing on its summit to look upon the sea below him.

In the little cove, or inlet, the small felucca of Tomaso Vicini was lying at anchor. No one was on her deck.

"Vicini has got home," muttered Popley. "His wife expected him yesterday."

Withdrawing his gaze from the little vessel, Popley scanned the rocks in search of Tressilian. He beheld him seated in his favourite nook, and advanced to his side.

"How do you feel this morning, Mr. Lowder?" he inquired, respectfully, for, despite Guy's condition of mind, he still inspired respect.

Tressilian looked at him mournfully, his thin features quivering, his sad eyes glowing with a wistful light, and demanded:

"Where is Olla?"

"She can't come to-day, sir—"

"I want Olla," interrupted Tressilian, in his low, sad monotone. "I want Olla."

These words, repeated in a piteous voice, were his only answer to Popley's explanations and questionings. Finally Popley, disheartened and discouraged, turned away, proceeding to the cottage.

At its door he was met by a Sicilian woman, who was coming out hastily. He passed her, and went in. There was a group of women in the neat living-room of the cottage, and they were all weeping. The sound of sobbing came from the inner room, the door of which was open.

Peeping into the inner chamber, the awe-struck Popley beheld upon the bed, stretched out to a seemingly unnatural length, a human figure. A sheet was drawn over it, and tall wax lights were burning at its head and feet.

The truth flashed upon him: Tomaso Vicini was dead!

The Englishman was standing there, still awe-struck and speechless, when Mrs. Vicini, her eyes red and swollen with weeping, came out of the bedroom. She saw Popley on the threshold, and came out to him, drawing him towards Tressilian.

"Tomaso is dead!" she said, sobbing.

Popley had acquired a small stock of Italian for travelling purposes, and was at no loss to understand his hostess.

"How did he die, signora?" he asked.

"It was an accident. He was swept overboard in a squall, in attempting to take in sail, and received such a blow that he was stunned. The comrade he had hired to go with him on this cruise rescued him, but he was quite dead. He was brought home yesterday."

She gave way to a tempest of grief.

Popley expressed his sympathy and his consternation.

"I want to say," said Mrs. Vicini, hushing her sobs, "that after the funeral, I am going home to my own people. I came from Catania, on the east side of the island. There will I go in my sorrow and widowhood! I cannot take the poor young Inglesse with me. None of the neighbours are willing to keep him. I shall sell the cottage, the vineyard, and the goats. The felucca—you see it down yonder—is also for sale."

"But what is to be done with Mr. Lowder?"

"Heaven knows—I don't. I love the poor young Inglesse, but I have a lame brother and a consumptive sister, and I cannot take him to my home. I am sorry for him, poor unfortunate! It is not fitting that he should go to a madhouse. He can stay here three days longer. Ask the beautiful Inglesina what I am to do with him. Ask the noble Inglesse guardian. They are his countrypeople. They should provide for him!"

With another outburst of her great sorrow, the poor peasant widow returned to the cottage and to her bed.

Tressilian, unconscious that his destiny was in the balance, asked again sadly for "Olla."

With that same ringing in his ears, Popley began the descent of the bluff, and sorrowfully turned his face towards the Villa Bella Vista.

"I wish I could see my way out of this trouble," he muttered. "Miss Olla has taken a wonderful fancy to this poor Mr. Lowder. Here she is shut up, and he is on the point of being cast loose on the world as a crazy beggar, or shut up for life in a Sicilian madhouse! Which is the worst? What will poor Miss Olla say?"

He harried on, his kindly soul oppressed with a terrible gloom.

Poor Guy! A crisis in his destiny had indeed arrived. What was to be his fate?

(To be continued.)

DO MEN PREFER FRIVOLOUS TO SENSIBLE WOMEN?—If men really desire that women should be rational instead of frivolous, why do even the most sensible of them single out for their attentions in company those women who have nothing but frivolity to recommend them to their notice? It seems to us that it would be more consistent in men to cease their animadversions on this subject until they first show by their actions that they can appreciate good sense and intelligence in women. Don't be carried away, gentlemen, by that brilliant

setting which pinchbook sometimes flaunts in your faces.

AMY ROBSART.

By BRACEBRIDGE HEMING.

Author of "Heart's Content," "Evander," &c., &c.

CHAPTER LI.

Life's a jest, and all things show it;
I thought so—once, and now I know it.

THE loss of his precious treasure preyed upon Anthony Foster like a disease. On his return to Cummoor Place he sat moping in the vault from which it had disappeared, and when he met his daughter he was reserved, sullen, and silent. He spoke only in monosyllables when addressed, and went about the house like one heartbroken, moaning and mumbling to himself.

A coroner's jury sat upon the remains of Dick Whistler, and, acting on the evidence given by Foster, returned a verdict of murder against Varney, who became a proscribed as well as a disgraced man. His name was bandied about from one to the other; hue and cry was ordered. No longer was he entitled to call himself knight; the queen had expressly commanded that his rank should be taken from him. His fall was as complete as it was sudden. No clue could be obtained to his whereabouts, though it was suspected he had taken refuge in London, nor was the conjecture erroneous, as we shall presently see.

Barfoot recovered rapidly from his hurt, under the tender nursing and unremitting care of Janet, who was ever at his side, and her presence acted upon him with the best possible effect. He learnt the news of Varney's downfall, which had travelled from Konilworth, as well as Amy's return to Lidcote and her father's restoration to health. When he had sufficiently recovered, he walked in the garden and park attached to the old domain, and Janet as often as not took her work out into the sun and strolled by his side.

Those were pleasant days. Thoroughly enamoured of the young Precisian, Barfoot whispered words of love in her not unwilling ears, and she encouraged him in his advances. To her love was a new passion, which burnt all the more strongly in her maiden breast because she had never before felt its power.

One delightful evening, when the sun was sinking to rest in the fleecy clouds like a ball of fire, they had sat down under the branches of a spreading beech tree. They were talking of their future, for Barfoot had already made her promise to be his, and her lips had faltered the consent which he had struggled so hard to gain.

"I fear my father will never give his consent," said Janet, "and, of course, my acceptance of you must be subject to his approval. I hold the fifth commandment in too much reverence to disobey him. Is it not said 'Honour your father that your days may be long in the land'?"

"If Master Foster will not listen to reason we must wait his good pleasure," answered Barfoot, cheerfully. "He cannot prevent us from loving each other, and the day must come sooner or later when we shall be one. Perhaps if I talk to him he may relent. He thinks me poor."

"Ay, that is the stumbling-block to a mind like his, I am sorry to say. No suitor would appear favourable unless he had good store of money bags."

"But he does not know that I have kind and influential friends," answered Barfoot. "Odds my life!"

Janet held up her finger warningly. "What have you promised me?" she exclaimed. "Did you not for my sake undertake to break yourself of that profane habit of swearing? It is the index to a vacant mind, and the way by which the ignorant make up for a want of intelligence."

"Your pardon, Janet," said Barfoot, in a contrite tone. "I have led a wild life, and been knocked about from pillar to post. 'Tis hard to shake off a bad custom, but I will try with might and main to gain your approval in words and deeds. You did right to remind me; 'twas a slip, but it shall not occur again. I can say with Ruth 'Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'"

"You will find me a hard taskmistress, for I am very strict in matters of religion," said Janet. "I always say 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might,' and it is the same with one's rule of life. There must be no half-measures. 'The Son of Man cometh like a thief in the night,' none of us know of his coming, therefore it behoves all to be prepared. If a man is careless as to his future, 'it were better for him that a millstone were hanged round his neck.' Master Preach-the-Word delivered a most edifying discourse on that very text only last Sunday; I wish you had been there."

"I will accompany you when next you go," rejoined Barfoot; "but what I was about to say is this: Tressilian has promised me reward for what little I have done for him. The countess is also beholden to me for my good offices on more than one occasion, and if I ask for money it will be forthcoming. If Master Foster will only name the sum he expects your husband to deposit, I will lay my life that I rake it together by an appeal to my patrons."

"I doubt it not," replied Janet, joyfully. "You shall see and speak with him this very evening, then the suspense that at present weighs upon us shall be removed. Is it not sad to see my father so taken up with the greed of this same filthy lucre? Truly 'the love of money is the root of all evil.' He has instructed me and kept me as the apple of his eye, fearful lest any contamination should befall me. I have seen him struggle against his greed, yet he halted between two opinions. Look at him now, his board is melted away like snow before the sunshine, and he is sick at heart. I have prayed for him. Oh! that my intercession may avail him!"

"Where is he to-day? I have not seen him," remarked Barfoot.

"Nor I; let us go seek him," Janet said. "Your communication respecting your ability to obtain money may comfort him like the balm of old."

They rose, and re-entered the house—going from room to room without finding any trace of Anthony Foster. At first they thought he had gone out on some matter of business, but by dint of questioning one of the domestics they learnt that he had been seen to go early in the morning to the vault which had been the repository of his gold.

"Let us speak with him there," suggested Janet. "Maybe it will shame him out of this melancholy moping. It is wicked to repine in this way after perishable things, and I do not think I shall exceed the duty of a daughter if I remonstrate with him on his conduct. Who can tell what the end will be if he continue to give way to his regret for his loss?"

"Wisely spoken," said Barfoot. "This a sort of madness and should be checked, or the brain may become affected as well as the heart."

"He has sown the wind and now he reaps the whirlwind," answered Janet, who was always ready with her apt illustrations culled from the scriptures, of which she was a diligent reader.

They made their way, with a lamp, to the underground passage, at the extremity of which the treasure-vault was situated. No sound came from it. Janet called to her father, receiving no reply, and she began to think the information she had received was not to be relied upon, when Barfoot pushed back the door and gazed boldly in, crying:

"Master Anthony Foster! Master Foster, I say!"

There was no reply, though, to their astonishment, Foster was seen sitting upon the lid of the treasure-box, his hands by his side and his head leaning against the wall. He was like one overtaken by sleep in the midst of a weary vigil.

"I will venture to wake him," said Barfoot, raising one of his hands, which he immediately let fall, with a loud cry.

It was cold as a stone.

Janet regarded him in terrified surprise.

"Come away, my dear," he said, softly. "This is no place for you now. Come with me."

"Oh! what is it? For Heaven's sake, tell me!" cried Janet. "Is—is he—"

She could say no more. Barfoot's face was eloquent of the startling fact. The vault was the chamber of death. Anthony Foster had died of a broken heart. She saw it, she knew it, and a chill went through her which nearly brought on a swoon; but Barfoot drew her gently away, and, in carefully measured words, gradually let her know the full extent of the calamity which had befallen.

Leaving her with one of the women servants whom he had called to his assistance, he again made his way to the vault, and, with some difficulty, carried the body of Foster to his own sleeping-room, laying him upon the bed; he was quite dead, and life had apparently been extinct for some hours. This was a singular exemplification of the influence of the mind over the vital functions of the body. The miser had died literally of a broken heart. He could not survive the loss of his cherished gold—that gone, he had nothing left to live for; and the robbery so prayed upon him that he wasted and declined until he gave up the ghost.

For a time Janet was inconsolable; but after the funeral, which was largely attended by the neighbours, more out of respect for her than love or veneration for her father, she threw off her excessive grief. The old house became distasteful to her, and Barfoot suggested that they should journey to Lidcote.

Discharging the servants, Janet took leave of her friends, and, in company with her lover, travelled to Devonshire. Their reception by the countess proved

that they had not indulged in extravagant anticipations. Janet was appointed Amy's maid, and Barfoot provided with board and lodging in the capacity of an additional stable hand until Tresillian's return from Kenilworth, which was daily expected.

The old knight had grown quite strong and well again; he was foremost in the chase as of old, and the red deer in the forest of Exmoor had speedy cause to acknowledge his prowess.

CHAPTER LII.

The glories of our birth and state
Are shadows, not substantial things.

When Varney quitted Kenilworth he went straight to London, bestirring a good horse and having substantial store of gold pieces in his purse. His heart was full of rage and malice. So extraordinary had been his downfall that when he thought of his dismissal from the court by the queen herself he fancied he must be dreaming. A short time before his prospects were of a rosy hue, everything was bright and promising, now the pleasant landscape had been changed into a bleak and howling desert as if by enchantment.

In the perversity of his mind he did not blame himself and consider that his own misconduct had brought the calamity upon him; he was of opinion that Elizabeth had made a scapegoat of him to screen her favourite, Leicester; he felt himself an injured man. There was even some hope that his fortunes might mend when the affair had blown over and been forgotten, so that by the time he reached London he was not so cast down as he had been; he did not shun the gaze of men, and imagine that those who stared hard at him were inclined to point the finger of scorn at the once brilliant and rising Sir Richard Varney.

But when he mingled in these places of resort where he had been wont to meet companions of his own stamp, he found that swift-winged rumour had been before him, and that his disgrace was as well known in Westminster and London as it was at Kenilworth. It was even hinted to him that the officers of the law required his presence to answer for his share in the tragic end of Dick Whistler. Disgusted with every one and everything, he disappeared from fashionable haunts, and took up his abode at the house of one to whom he had done a service in his prosperous days, who lived in one of the streets running from Fleet Street to the river—not a savoury locality, but one in which he gained seclusion and security.

Here he occupied himself in writing letters of vindication of his personal character to the principal noblemen attached to the court, and especially to the Earl of Leicester; but he had the mortification of neglect, for he received no reply to any of his communications.

He grew desperately sullen and morose, entertaining thoughts of going abroad in the first ship that sailed to the New World. Then he considered the propriety of travelling to France and becoming a soldier of fortune. His mind was a sea of doubts; he became weak and irresolute.

In this state he one morning met his old friend and servant Alcazar in a narrow street not far from his own domicile. The astrologer was hurrying along as if time was an object of importance, and, though he might well have seen Varney, did not appear to do so.

The latter, determining to have speech of him, hastened after the old man, overtaking him just as he entered the door of a dilapidated house in an incipient state of decay. Before Alcazar could close the door, Varney had interposed his lithe and agile form, and faced the charlatan.

"What!" he cried. "Is it thus you treat your old friends? You were ever sly as a fox, thou vendor of poisons, and impostor of the stars. But you don't get rid of me so easily as you think for. We have much to say to each other; so open freely and admit me with all the rights of hospitality."

"Is it you?" exclaimed Alcazar, affecting to recognise him for the first time. "My sight is not so good as I could wish it to be. The search after the great arcana is ever trying to the eyes, by reason of the potent drugs we are compelled to use. You are welcome to enter any abode in which I have a footing, that thou wilt knowest, so spare your courtesy abuse of an old man."

The house was spacious and roomy inside, but the interior partook of the ruinous and dreary neglect which so painfully characterised the outside. Into a room on the ground-floor Alcazar conducted his unexpected visitor. It was chiefly remarkable for its absence of furniture and its collection of vessels used by alchemists. A pungent odour pervaded the apartment. Presenting Varney with the only chair he had, Alcazar locked the door and placed the key on a small table. This roused Varney's suspicions.

"Why lock your door?" he exclaimed. "Beware how you attempt to play foul with me, ill-omened bird of Satan! I would as soon run my sword through your ungainly and worthless carcase as I would look at thee."

"'Tis a measure of precaution," answered the alchemist, with a shrewd look. "There is an outcry in the town just now about magic and witchcraft. Those who follow our profession are watched, and have an ill time of it, if they are suspected of dealings with the prince of darkness. Such is the popular ignorance. Those who live in this house are of the vulgar, and I let no face peer into my laboratory."

"Oh, if that is all, you may even have your whim; but you and I know one another of old, my worthy confrère," said Varney, with a laugh, placed at his ease by Alcazar's reply.

At the same time he took advantage of the alchemist's back being turned to slip the key into his pocket, so as to be prepared to make a sudden effort to escape in the event of its being rendered necessary by attempted treachery on the old man's part.

"I will proceed with my experiments, as time is precious, and I am on the eve of a grand discovery," cried Alcazar. "Have you any objection? The fumes may be unpleasant, but you will not find the vapour dangerous."

"It puzzles me to think how so clever a rogue should have so soft a brain. You have wasted a lifetime in these frivolous and empty pursuits," said Varney, "and with what result? Others have done the same thing, and in what have they been benefited?"

"The span of life allotted to man has been all too short for the master minds of which you speak, as it may be for me, though I feel as certain of ultimate success as they did."

"In spite of your assurance," continued Varney, "you did not disdain to make off with Anthony Foster's gold. 'Twas a clever trick."

"I?" exclaimed Alcazar, in affected astonishment. "Yes, you, my prince of jugglers. Seek not to mystify me. Do I not know you as well as you know yourself? Be! I'll not betray you, provided you give me a full half of your plunder to hold my tongue. The world has dealt hardly with me lately. I need money."

"You need money!" cried the alchemist, suspending his operations in sheer amazement. "Have you not the Earl of Leicester's treasury open to you? Are you not a favourite at court?"

"I had—I was. There you have your answer. I have fallen, Alcazar—fallen from my high estate! I have been dismissed the court. I no longer serve my Lord of Leicester."

"Why this change?"

"My ambition vaulted so high that it overleaped itself. I was too good a servant. I hazarded too much for my master's sake, who, to save himself, sacrificed me. Ask me no more. The subject is not so pleasing that I like to dwell upon it. Let the fact content you, man."

"Is it, indeed, a fact? Verily are the mighty fallen!" said Alcazar.

"Where have you bestowed your treasure? Give me my share, and I will not trouble you," continued Varney. "I have a right, I consider, to one full half."

"If you press me, you must have it—though the old miser had not such a store as I had imagined," returned the alchemist, still busying himself with his work.

Some charcoal was burning in a chafin-dish, and on it Alcazar threw a powder which he had carefully prepared. As it began to smoulder it threw up a volume of smoke that became each moment denser. He put on a mask at this juncture, through which the vapour could not penetrate, and peered over the dish, stirring its contents with a bar of iron, finely wrought.

"What fiend's mess is this?" cried Varney. "Why wear you a mask? I will have no more of this; give me the chafin-dish, that I may cast it out of you window into the street."

"Softly," replied Alcazar. "I told you I was proceeding with my experiment. There is no danger. I but wish to obtain a precipitate."

Varney, however, was not satisfied; he got up and went towards the tripod on which stood the chafin-dish with the evident intention of throwing it away.

The air grew denser.

As it penetrated his lungs he felt a sort of suffocation taking possession of him, and began to cough alarmingly; nor, though he tried to advance, was he able to do so. He was in a measure paralysed.

Great drops of perspiration stood out on his clammy brow, his heart beat fiercely; fixing his gaze on Alcazar, he placed a handkerchief to his mouth, which filtered the noxious atmosphere, and allowed him to partially recover.

Then he rushed upon Alcazar, whom he seized by the throat, crying:

"Treacherous dog, you shall repent you of your treason!"

But the effort cost him his life. The air once more penetrated his lungs, and he fell on the floor insensible.

In the struggle the mask which the alchemist wore as a protection against the poisonous fumes he was distilling fell off, and was ground up under the heels of the two men.

"The key! the key!" cried Alcazar, "or I am lost."

In an agony of expectation, he looked upon the table for the key of the door, but it was not where he had placed it; he had not seen Varney put it in his pocket, and did not know where to search for it. The unhappy man reeled from place to place like one overcome with spirituous liquors; at last he laid himself down close to the door and sucked in the air which came from the passage, but all in vain.

It had been his intention to poison Varney, in order to save himself from being despoiled of half the money which he had taken from Anthony Foster, so it came to pass that this wretched gold, scraped up by iniquity, cost the lives of three men.

The alchemist fought hard for life, but the deadly vapour was too strong for him. He was caught in his own toils, there was no escape, and he perished miserably, sharing the fate he had ruthlessly meted out to his victim.

A girl employed as a servant in the house had been standing on a balcony outside the window of the room, and, attracted by curiosity, had watched the movements of the two men, hearing their conversation, but not thoroughly understanding the nature of the tragedy which was taking place.

At last, when she gave the alarm, it was too late.

The people of the house broke in the door, but neither their care nor the skill of a leech could restore life to the dead men.

When the facts were reported to the magistrates a search was made, and a large treasure found hidden away under the floor of the room. The servant's testimony went to prove that this was the property of Anthony Foster. Janet was ultimately communicated with, and the money handed over to her, the sum arriving well as a marriage portion, and solving the difficulty of existence which had perplexed her and Barfoot.

Thus perished Richard Varney and his crafty accomplice in many a dark deed. He was a bold, bad man, but there were many like him in those days. The Earl of Leicester could not but feel a sense of relief at hearing of his death, for in his recent letters Varney had threatened him in various ways, and he had feared the fellow might prove troublesome.

CHAPTER LIII.

With these conversing, I forgot all time.

All seasons, and their change; all pleasures alike.

We must now follow Tresillian's fortunes at Kenilworth, whither he wandered as quickly as his steed would carry him.

He was not a man to allow extravagant expectations to run away with his reason, but he was jubilant, because he saw in Amy's settled dislike to Leicester something favourable to his suit. He had never ceased to love Amy. He had controlled and smothered his passion when she became the wife of another, but still the embers smouldered, and when he beheld a chance of her matrimonial chain being broken the dormant fire was fanned into a fierce blaze, and he rode gaily along, indulging sweet visions of future happiness and bliss unspeakable.

Elizabeth was impatient for his return. The festivities which Leicester crowded into each day's entertainment wearied her by repetition, and she wished to go back to Greenwich. Had she not made up her mind to complete the proud earl's humiliation by having his bride publicly recognised, she would have gone long before.

When Tresillian sought the royal presence, and delivered his credentials, her disappointment was great, but, on the other hand, she felt pleased to think that the earl would be free from his fair-haired toy as she had more than once designated Amy Robsart.

Having read the letter written by Sir Hugh Robsart, and that penned by Amy, she summoned the Earl of Leicester, having received Tresillian alone.

The earl made his appearance, filled with anxiety, for he had heard that Tresillian had returned by himself, and he had vainly tried to have speech of him before he saw Elizabeth.

"Soh! my lord!" exclaimed the queen. "We find you have not a very loving wife; her affection will not bring her hither to renew the conjugal bliss which her marriage should have bestowed upon you. It appears that you are not all-powerful with the fair sex, however much you may in your vanity have flattered yourself that you were."

"How means your majesty?" answered Leicester. "I must confess that I am at a loss to understand you."



[A BROKEN HEART.]

"Say you so? Then read these epistles which our trusty messenger Tresillian has brought us from Lidcote."

So saying, the queen handed to the earl the two missives, which he read carefully with varying emotion.

"I will compel her to obey me," he exclaimed, with rising anger. "How dare she fly in my face in this manner! I have a shrewd suspicion that your majesty's 'trusty' messenger has had a hand in this."

"I!" cried Tresillian, flushing angrily. "My word for it, that in no way did I influence the lady in her determination. Rather seek an explanation in your own double-dealing, my lord, which has brought its fitting reward."

The earl was about to reply when Elizabeth interposed, saying:

"We will have no word-banding here, sirs. This unhappy lady has already caused enough dissension and mystery. Tresillian is right, my Lord of Leicester. You have but yourself to thank for this ill news, if it be ill to your thinking."

"Nay, she may please herself," rejoined the earl, with a callous air, badly affected. "Had not your majesty commanded her presence here, I doubt whether I should have been at the pains of sending for her. What grieved me was her refusal to comply with your royal mandate, not the seeming loss of her affection."

"Seeming loss," repeated the queen. "Methinks she expresses herself in a manner sufficiently decided to convince you of her dislike for yourself. She has requested us, in the exercise of our royal prerogative, to declare this marriage void, and it likes us well to do so. You, my lord, owe your services to your country, and should not waste your precious time in silken dalliance. The matter shall be brought before our privy council at once, and, we doubt not, the lords will see the wisdom of declaring your alliance null and void. 'Twas a marriage contracted in secret and by stealth. You had not the consent of your sovereign, nor did the lady consult her friends and relations. It is no marriage, I say!"

"But, madame, remember—" "What! do you dispute our will?" cried the queen, passionately. "We say it is no legal marriage, and shall not stand. Beware, my lord, how you try our patience too far."

Leicester muttered something which was inaudible. Turning from him to Tresillian, she added:

"The prayer of this lady, sir, shall be granted with all dispatch. We pray you take that rest and refreshment of which you must stand in need after your exertions in obedience to our instructions. To-

morrow we purpose to take our leave of this Castle of Kenilworth, but ere we go you shall be provided with a decree of our privy council, dissolving the union of which we have been speaking, so that the so-called Countess of Leicester, of whom we have heard so much lately, shall be plain Mistress Amy Robsart once more, though we think she will not long be content with her maiden designation."

"Craving your pardon, madame, I see no reason to think otherwise," said Tresillian, in some confusion.

"Tut, tut, man!" cried the queen, in the blunt manner she assumed on certain occasions, "although we have personally had no experience of this same strange passion—love—yet we have a woman's instinct," and she lowered her voice so as not to be heard by Leicester, who was chafing some distance off, "and should it be so, by our royal word, the girl shall not want a dowry. We are much beholden to you, Master Tresillian, and though that sage, King Solomon, has warned succeeding generations, as I think, if our memory does not fail us, not to put trust in princes, you shall find that we are not unmindful of a service rendered."

Tresillian bent low and kissed the queen's hand at this mark of his sovereign's favour.

Bidding the earl follow her, Elizabeth rejoined her courtiers, and, on reaching the throne room, exclaimed, in a loud, bantering tone:

"We are doomed to disappointment. There is to be no marriage, after all. My Lord of Leicester's wife has so little liking for him that she begs us to annul the marriage. We intend to have the matter laid before our privy council, and if there be law for it, she shall be rid of him. We like not the idea of a woman living with a man against her will, though we must candidly admit we did not think the Earl of Leicester could become so repulsive in a fair one's eyes."

"The fair are ever capricious, madame," observed Sir Walter Raleigh.

"What, Sir Walter, would you enter the lists against me on such a question?" said the queen.

"I should be running an ill tilt an I did," replied Raleigh.

"How so?"

"In an encounter of wits your majesty would be sure to worst me."

The queen smiled, and intimated her intention of quitting Kenilworth on the morrow, at which announcement no one was sorry, the revels having lasted long enough to please every one.

Now that Leicester was rid of his wife, the queen regarded him with more favour, and the unpleasant

episode which had for so long afforded food for scandal to the court gossips began to be forgotten.

The privy councillors readily declared the marriage null and void, as it was her majesty's wish they should do so, and the lord chancellor set his seal to the decree, with which Tresillian was despatched to Lidcote.

The royal party returned to town, and if Leicester felt keenly the separation from his once-loved wife, he did not show his grief. Amy's name never passed his lips. He was gay, and of a more sprightly wit than ever, so that Elizabeth's jealousy gradually vanished, and the noble lord's position became more firmly secured than before.

Tresillian brought joy and contentment to Sir Hugh Robsart's home.

Amy smiled upon him with all her former sweetness, evidently trying to make amends for her cruel desertion.

At length he summoned courage enough to ask her to be his, and she, nothing loth, gave him her hand, assuring him that, though she knew it not at the time of her infatuation, her heart had always been his.

The wedding was celebrated with great rejoicing. The queen was as good as her word, and settled a handsome annuity upon the bride, whom Tresillian would have taken to his father's house had she not expressed a wish to remain with Sir Hugh so long as he might be spared to them.

Barfoot and Janet were married on the same day, and handsomely provided for by Tresillian, with whose presents and the money found at Alcazar's death they bought a neat little farm in close contiguity to Lidcote, and frequently enjoyed the happiness of seeing the young squire and his lady.

The married life of Tresillian and Amy was one long dream of bliss; they forgot that they had ever been separated. Nothing would induce them to go to town, or accept any position at court. They were happy in their simple sphere, and found sufficient occupation for their unambitious minds in doing good to all around them.

Sir Hugh Robsart lived to a ripe old age, and was frequently seen in the hunting-field as of yore, and when dying he passed serenely away, invoking Heaven's blessing on his children, as he called Amy and her husband.

Mutual love and the exercise of virtue opened up for these chaste spirits the true terrestrial paradise, which they enjoyed the more because they had reached it only through the purifying fire of long-suffering and pious endurance.

THE END.



[ANGUS ASSERTS HIMSELF.]

HOW DID LADY NEVILLE DIE?

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"The Unloved Wife," "The Curse of Everleigh," &c.

CHAPTER XII.

Am I to set my life upon a throw? *Overper.*

LADY AUDREY SAVILLE was the rage that season. Her wonderful beauty, her eccentricities, her magnificence—for that strange man, Salaris, lavished gifts worthy a princess's acceptance upon her constantly—the mystery that floated like an impalpable cloud about both herself and Sir Angus, whetted public interest constantly, and kept an unsated curiosity always on the *qui vive*.

Madame Revere remained in London, and was one of the queens of that brilliant circle in whose innermost orbit Lady Audrey revolved so eccentrically.

By every art of the accomplished and fascinating woman of the world, Madame Revere cultivated the gay and inexperienced Lady Audrey.

Lady Audrey was passionately fond of display, of dress, dancing, pleasure.

She went everywhere, she smiled on everybody she liked, and snubbed everybody she did not like in a truly independent manner.

She had masters of every sort to accomplish and instruct her, and she took kindly to—her dancing master.

So the dash, the fearless independence, the sparkle and flash of the little wild mountain girl, made her for that season, at least, the belle of London.

Claude looked on nearly frenzied. He hated every man this coquettish and spoiled young creature smiled upon. A million times he cursed his folly and blindness in not securing her when he might, before she had ever seen Sir Angus or left her Scottish hills.

He was not ready yet to spring that mine which was to engulf everything this dazzling girl loved and force her to accept him.

He paid assiduous court to the beautiful and capricious belle, but he was only like a thousand others in that; capricious, sparkling, pleasure-loving Audrey showed no appreciation of him above others, polished flirt and exquisite though he was.

Sir Angus Saville remonstrated with his mad little wife sometimes; she was so gay, so reckless, so beautiful, inexperienced, and self-willed, that he was in constant terror of her falling into some trouble.

But Audrey had a temper like gunpowder withal, and the slightest remonstrance was sure to end in a scene sad to see, and sadder in its effects, because it infected the adoring young husband with a fatal, too

easily rooted fancy that his beautiful wife had never loved him.

But one day Salaris, who had looked on at these continual bickerings with anxious and disquiet feelings, proposed to Sir Angus that he should go abroad for a couple of years, and leave Audrey under his protection.

Audrey dropped the things she was holding, and turned round. Her face was white—her eyes looked like points of jet.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean," said Salaris, sternly, "that your reckless and unwomanly flirtations with other men are driving your husband to the belief that you do not love him. I have that conviction myself, from what I have seen."

At that moment the pale, noble, intellectual face of Sir Angus appeared in the doorway. My lady had sent for him in her first anger at Salaris's proposition.

"So you were going on the Continent to get away from me?" she said, with a mocking inflection, to her husband.

"What nonsense, Audrey—" began Salaris, but she would not let him finish.

"Go, by all means go," she nodded, angrily, derisively. "I know one who will never miss you."

Sir Angus grew deadly pale, and put up his hand as if to ward off a blow.

"Audrey, I insist—" began Salaris, again.

But Sir Angus interrupted him this time, coming forward, and speaking in a strained and unnatural voice.

"Please to go," he said to Salaris. "We shall do much better alone."

Salaris turned; he looked at the young man's pale and quivering lips.

"She loves you," he said, in a low voice. "Don't be an idiot, Angus. She does love you."

Sir Angus smiled bitterly in reply, and Salaris reluctantly left the two alone.

"Oh, yes," mimicked Audrey, with another mocking flash of her great eyes, for she had heard Salaris. "You will see how much she loves you."

"Audrey," spoke her husband. "I have no thought of going on the Continent. Not even if you desired it, would I go and leave you. For a woman who does not love her husband doubly needs his devotion to stand between her and the tongue of the world."

Lady Audrey looked down a moment at the rich trimming on her velvet dress, and fingered the gold ornament at her slender throat. Her lips trembled slightly.

Suddenly she spoke impatiently, yet with feeling.

"I am the woman who doesn't love her husband, is that what you mean?" Her dark cheek flushed. "What a miserable, misguided, senseless creature I must be, not to love a man whom all the rest of the women in London are crazy about; one who is so much above every other man I know."

Sir Angus looked up in amazement. His beautiful wife had a habit of saying pleasant things in a satirical voice that extracted all their sweetness, but she did not seem to be mocking him now.

Their eyes met. Hers were full of tears, his sorrowful and perplexed.

Audrey smiled reproachfully.

"Angus," she said, "don't you think you are a great simpleton to be always imagining I don't love you? Come, if I hear any more of this nonsense, I shall think it is because you wish to make sport of me for loving you so much."

Sir Angus caught her to his heart in a rapture.

"My darling," he said, kissing her fondly, "I am a simpleton."

To Salaris's great and sincere relief the two made their appearance soon after.

He took this opportunity to put in execution a project he had long had in view. He purchased a superb mansion in St. James's Square, and caused it to be fitted up in the most magnificent style.

At the same time he deposited a large sum of money at the bank in Sir Angus's name, and gave him the receipts.

The young people were speedily installed in the new residence.

To Claude Revere this change was very welcome, because it increased his facilities for seeing that bright and witching creature with whom he was so madly and wickedly in love.

"Madame Revere," said Claude, abruptly, one day, "have you ever seen Lady Saville's maid?"

"No; why?"

"I have a suspicion in connection with her. Will you be good enough to embrace the first opportunity to see her?"

Madame promised to do so, but either Lady Audrey's maid had powerful motives for wishing to avoid her, or else accident singularly hindered the desired meeting.

Finally, madame ascertained where the maid, who was strict in such matters, went to church, and she followed her there.

Lettice kept her veil down most of the time, but towards the last part of the service she lifted it.

Claude was waiting for madame when she came out.

"Well?" he questioned, impatiently, as madame sank back upon the carriage cushions with a white, affrighted face.

"Lettice, indeed?" cried madame; "the woman is Royce Ferguson!"

"I suspected it," said Claude, quietly.

"You—how?"

"I heard somebody call her Royce once, under very singular circumstances, and I remembered it the moment I saw her here and found she called herself Lettice. Didn't you tell me once that Salaris married that girl?"

"He did."

"How comes she in his house under a false name, then, and a waiting-maid too?"

"It is very singular, certainly."

"I think I understand it," Claude returned, after a perplexed pause, in which he had recalled what Royce had told him about an estrangement from her husband; "but however that is, she may be very dangerous to us, since she, without doubt, knows which of those two children she helped to steal is the true heir. She ought to belong to us soul and body, Madame Revere," he said, with a look that thrilled the nervous woman by his side.

"Claude," said madame, suddenly, "what if Sir Angus were my son, after all? Oh! what if he were?"

A strange gleam irradiated that handsome, wicked face.

"Madame, if it could be proved, I should come at once into the possession of the immense Neville estates, and my first act would be to settle upon yourself an income worthy a duchess."

Sir Angus Saville called upon Madame Revere in due time. But he never went but once, and always avoided her scrupulously afterwards.

"I don't know why," he said, in reply to his wife's wondering inquiries; "I don't know why I dislike that woman so, but the very sight of her turns my blood cold."

Salaris Vivian had immense wealth; he was greatly esteemed in the world at large as a man of liberality and high-toned principle, and no whisper concerning his mysteriously gotten riches ever connected his name with any dishonourable or villainous transaction.

But he was far from being happy.

"Miserable man that I am," he said to himself as he sat alone in his study; "what right had I to arrogate to myself the execution of that vengeance which is the province of Heaven? Am I doing right now to keep the truth from Angus, my noble, sensitive, high-strung boy? I see every time we meet that the money I lavish on him never for a moment makes him forget the grief of his life—that he has no right to the name he bears. But if I told him all, all, alas! that it is in my power to tell him, would he be any happier? Would he not, on the contrary, be still more miserable?"

His gloomy musings were interrupted by the entrance of Sir Angus himself. The young man's fine face was flushed, his large eyes dark with anger.

"In the name of all that is merciful," he cried, in an anguished voice, "tell me who I am!"

Salaris knit his brow, and grew pale.

"Has anything happened, Angus?" he asked, in a grave tone.

"Nothing new," Sir Angus replied, bitterly; "only a fellow at the club asked me what branch of the Saville family I belonged to. The same thing happened yesterday, and once last week. The first time, I pretended not to hear, the second, I asked what difference it made, and to-day I knocked the man down. His name is Norris, and he comes of a noble stock, but I don't consider him a gentleman. But if he wants me to fight him I can't refuse, though I had much rather take a horsewhip to him than a pistol."

Sir Angus owed these repeated insults to Claude Revere, though he did not suspect it.

"If he gets killed in a duel all the better," Claude had said to himself, "and a great deal of trouble saved."

"You shall fight him," Salaris said, solemnly, "and give him his life, too, the villain, and not a hair of your own head shall suffer."

Sir Angus scarcely heard him.

"Salaris," he said, passionately, "when will you end this mystery of my miserable and degraded life, as you can, sir, as I am sure you can."

"Miserable—degraded?" repeated Salaris.

"Yes, degraded. I ask you, as man to man, if you would not consider it degradation to live the life I do? Is there an attribute of manhood that is not denied to me? Who am I? A myth—a nobody—a tool, a puppet, deprived of every aim and ambition in life, the very means to keep the wife I worship by my side furnished by another. How can Audrey help despising such a miserable apology for a man as I am?"

Salaris shuddered in spite of himself, and averted his face.

"I cannot tell you," he said.

"Because you do not know?"

"I do not know."

"Who does?"

"Heaven."

The young man was silent some moments.

"At least you can tell me something," he said, at last. "You have a clue, a suspicion, I am sure; your interest in me is not merely such as you would have for a common charity child, a wretched little babe found in a basket, as you have told me I was."

Salaris was silent. He dared not speak.

"Give me one hint," exclaimed Sir Angus, taking Salaris's white hand, and holding it with an impassioned pressure. "Only one word."

Salaris looked up in a troubled way.

"There is one explanation I have desired to make you, much as it costs me. Audrey is my child—my own and only child."

Sir Angus looked at him in incredulous amazement.

Salaris lifted his slender white hand solemnly.

"I cannot explain the mystery to you," he said, "but I swear to you that I have told you the truth."

The young man stood a moment with downcast eyes.

"Angus," Salaris said, earnestly, "if you hear from Norris, remember I am to be your friend. Whoever that scoundrel may be who challenges you, refer him to me. Will you trust me with all the preliminaries?"

This speech recalled to Sir Angus his quarrel just before.

"Yes, I will leave all to you," he said, with a sad and scornful smile.

"He is a villain; I am sure of it. But it is best to fight him," Salaris resumed. "You shall have it in your power to punish him bitterly."

Early the following day Mr. Norris's friend called upon Salaris.

"Sir Angus refers me to you for all arrangements," he said; "of course you know my principal will not settle it with an apology."

"He had better wait till he is asked," Salaris remarked, coldly, glancing at the card Mr. Norris's friend had brought him.

"Clarkson" was the name on the card.

Salaris looked at the man scrutinisingly.

"I expected you would be the one," he said, half to himself. "It would be rather difficult for Mr. Norris to find a gentleman to serve him in this business."

"What do you mean?" demanded Clarkson, losing colour.

"I mean that when I saw you last your name was Newell, and you were a beard and moustache. You slept in a double-bedded room with me at Liverpool six years ago, and you went away before light with a watch in your pocket that did not belong to you, and a purse with three hundred pounds in it. Do you wear the watch, or did you sell it, and what did you get for it? That watch cost me a hundred guineas, Mr. Clarkson Newell."

A look of the most abject terror came over the man's face.

"Don't betray me," he gasped. "I was in terrible need, and I'm married now. Think of my wife—my children, sir. I swear to you I have never done the like since."

"I shan't betray you," said Salaris, contemptuously, "only listen to me. Sir Angus Saville will fight only on these conditions. It shall be decided by lot who has the first fire, and—"

"Well, sir?"

Salaris fixed a stern glance upon him.

"You will load Mr. Norris's pistol—you will put no bullet in."

Clarkson stared and grew ashen.

"Why, that would be murder, sir!"

Salaris's fine lip curled.

"There shall be no murder done, only a scoundrel punished."

But Clarkson's colour did not come back.

"I'm not so bad as that," he said. "Norris is a bad fellow, and I don't owe him any good, but I can't connive—"

"I give you my word, his life shall not be touched. Refuse, and I will have you arrested for stealing my watch and purse."

The meeting took place at sunset that day. Sir Angus was pale, but cool and self-possessed. He, of course, knew nothing of that arrangement which Salaris had privately made with Clarkson. He endured all the agony of thinking that he had perhaps parted with his adored Audrey for ever, but his looks betrayed nothing of what he was suffering.

By an ingenious arrangement, in which Norris imagined himself to be tricking his foe, the first fire fell to his lot.

Not a muscle of Sir Angus's fine and noble face

altered as he waited to be shot at, and Norris took deliberate aim.

Sir Angus was, of course, unhurt. It was his turn to cover with his pistol the man who had insulted him.

The dark eye of the young man flashed as he slowly elevated his weapon, watching the changing, terror-stricken face opposite him. Then, as slowly lowering it, he said, quietly:

"I believe, by the rules of the code, I have a right to reserve my shot. Please to remember, Mr. Norris, that I hold my shot against you for the present."

The man's treacherous eyes shot a sinister gleam. He made no reply, but, taking Clarkson's arm, retired from the spot.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Tis she! but why that bleeding bosom gored?"

"—Oh, ever heartless, ever friendly! tell,

Is it a crime in heart to love too well?" Pope.

SIR ANGUS SAVILLE returned home. He entered that elegant mansion in St. James's Square, which had been his strange patron's last magnificent gift to himself and Audrey, with very different feelings from those with which he had left it. He entered eagerly, pausing an instant as the sound of voices reached him from the drawing-room, and his brow clouded slightly as he recognised one of the voices for Claude Revere's.

Lady Audrey coloured and hid her lovely lips at sight of her husband.

Claude Revere came forward to meet him with an overcast cordiality that, in spite of Sir Angus's genial mood, filled him with vague misgivings. Claude was very wordy. He exerted himself to the utmost to sustain conversation.

Sir Angus, though he wore a smiling and interested air, said very little himself, and his lady was absolutely silent. It was easy to see by the knitting of her slender black brows, and the flutter of her scarlet lips that she was not at her ease.

Claude took his departure presently, with a hypocritical clasp of Sir Angus's hand and a warning pressure of Lady Audrey's little cold fingers.

"He may suspect anything he likes," he said to himself, with an inward sneer. "My lady has too much temper to tell him the truth. I wonder how it happened that Norris didn't shoot him!"

Lady Audrey was not a good hypocrite.

Her cheeks were like fire as she haughtily averted her face from her husband's look of tender and anxious questioning, and went back to the window which she had quitted to take leave of Claude.

Sir Angus followed her.

"Can she have heard of this duel?" he wondered. "Has anything happened, Audrey?" he asked, trying to take her hand, which she jerked away from him instantly.

"No, indeed. What should?"

"But I am sure something has; your cheeks are burning, your eyes look angry. Oh, Audrey, don't tell me nothing is the matter when you look as I never saw you look at me before."

With a burst of hysterical laughter, Audrey flung herself away from him.

"Don't you hope I've been doing something disgraceful, something scandalously disgraceful, you hypocrite?" she cried.

Sir Angus's handsome cheek whitened at these insulting words. His first thought was that his wife had suddenly gone mad; then a suspicion flashed over him that the wilful, wayward girl had, perhaps, somehow committed herself to some act of fearful imprudence at which she herself was frightened now. He drew near her again and spoke tenderly.

"My darling, if you had you should find me your bulwark and defender from the consequences."

"Pah!" hissed Lady Audrey, clenching her hands and writhing in her chair. "Don't talk to me. I hate you. I wish the hills had upheaved and crushed you on your way to me. I wish the waters of Loch Inverness had boiled over and swept you to destruction; that the walls of the dear old ruins, where I was so happy, had fallen inward and crushed you when you asked me to be your wife."

"Audrey, Heaven's mercy! Audrey, what are you saying?" Sir Angus exclaimed, in an utterly horrified voice.

His accents more than his words recalled the excited girl to her senses.

She became suddenly silent, and this silence was succeeded by an hysterical gaiety more perplexing and painful still.

They had an engagement out that evening, and Sir Angus naturally imagined that, in her present state of mind, Lady Audrey would choose to remain at home.

But upon his suggesting it, though she had that moment been deciding in her own mind that she would not go, she declared that she never felt more like dancing in her life, and immediately quitted the

apartment for her dressing-room, where she made a most elaborate toilette, and presented herself to her husband, who had also dressed meanwhile, as wild and vivid a vision of beauty as ever the eye rested upon.

Her dress was of white satin, with a rich embroidery of scarlet upon the long train, and she wore an overdress of scarlet velvet, slightly looped with white roses, every simulated dew-drop upon which was a diamond of great value. Ornaments of the same rare stone were upon her neck and arms, and one cluster of intensely scarlet rose-buds glowed among her short black curls.

It was an extraordinary toilette for one so young, so petite and fairy-like, but Audrey glowed and sparkled, and blazed like some magnified fire-fly of the tropics.

She out-dazzled her brilliant little self this evening, and drew after her, wherever she moved, a constant chorus of comments upon her wonderful beauty, her wit, her eccentricities.

Her husband scarcely left her side.

"It is to watch me!" Lady Audrey said to herself, and blazed the more feverishly upon the moths fluttering in her train.

But if Lady Saville attracted universal and extravagant admiration from the men, the women were scarcely less enthusiastic concerning Sir Angus, whose commanding and elegant figure, the noble and spiritual beauty of his face, rendered him a distinguished and conspicuous object in the brilliant throng.

Claude Revere was there, a celebrated belle upon his arm, and all his energies seemingly exerted in anticipating her wishes; but his furtive, azure glance found time to read and exult in the language of those two faces, each telling him of the wretched heart that throbbed beneath that gay exterior.

He was too clever to intrude upon Lady Audrey again directly. He conjectured, rightly, that if he waited, he should be summoned ere long by herself.

But it was a week before he got that summons, though he haunted every resort of hers, and watched eagerly for that electric glance to fall upon him.

He was riding aimlessly down the Row one day, which was comparatively deserted at that hour, when there came a quick clatter of hoofs behind him, and Audrey's little gloved hand just touched his arm.

The rebellious blood surged into his handsome face in an uncontrollable tide, and in spite of his efforts not to show his joy at the sight of her, his eyes and his cheeks glowed, and his voice trembled in accosting her.

Lady Audrey did not perceive his agitation, however. She looked languid and changed, notwithstanding that feverish brightness of her eyes and colour which made her more ravishingly beautiful than ever in Claude's sight.

"I wanted to ask you," began she, stammering with agitation, "was—that woman—that woman called—Lady Lucia Desmond?"

Claude bowed—he could not trust himself to speak. "He has gone there now—he and Salaris. They have been away three days."

Claude started. He looked the surprise he really felt; then, seeing my lady's small white teeth bedded in the coral lip, and the little hand clenching itself passionately, he murmured, loud enough for her to hear:

"Infamous!"

My lady caught her breath in a sort of frenzy. "I shall go mad if I cannot punish him," she said, "yet I cannot think of a way. I lie awake at night and plot and plot, and I go all day thinking, thinking, but it all ends in nothing, and I am compelled to leave him the riches he has sold his soul for, while I spare the life of the woman he loves."

"Dear Lady Audrey," began Claude, with eagerness, "I can show you a way. I can show you how to make Lady Lucia scorn him, how to make himself a beggar."

Lady Audrey turned her wild eyes upon his face.

"Can you—can you?" she began, but shrunk from the evil fire of his eyes like a leaf scorched before flame. "I will see you again," she hastily said. "Good day."

Wheeling her horse she rode away like a meteor down the Row.

"Fool—fool! hasty and idiotic beyond measure. Why need I have scared her with my eagerness?" burst forth Claude as he watched the brilliant receding figure. "Curses upon you, Angus Saville! If I live I will have both your bride and your inheritance!"

Lady Audrey rode home at a mad pace. Her groom was not yet in sight when she reached the mansion in St. James's Square. She got off her horse herself without assistance, and hurrying to her own apartments, sent her maid away and locked the door. Then she began a wild and frantic pacing of the room.

Jealousy is a horrible companion. It unsexes a woman, it makes a demon of a man, and when it possesses a young, fiery, undisciplined nature like this one it rends it like an evil spirit.

Lady Audrey's lips were blanched, her eyes seemed literally to contain sparks of fire.

"Oh!" she cried, nodding her head rapidly, and striking her little hands furiously together, "let me just live long enough to pay them all off and I am willing to die. They have got the little mountain girl in a trap, have they? Wait—wait!"

She ran to a small closet which opened off her bath-room, and dragged out the little trunk of scented wood which held the boy's costume in which she had fled from the hated French school at which her husband had placed her immediately after their marriage.

"Little ignoramus," Bob Towers had called her, and he was not far from right.

With very little education herself, Royce Ferguson Vivian (Lettice she called herself now) could impart no more than she knew to her child; and she had been too proud and fiery angry with the husband and father who had banished them both to ask him for masters for the daughter he had virtually disowned.

What wonder then that the seeds sown by Claude Revere in this wild, passionate, and neglected nature should have taken such fatal root?

Lady Audrey found that she had not outgrown this suit of boy's clothes, or perhaps she was so excited she did not think of that.

It was a plain black cloth suit, such as a boy of twelve might have for a holiday dress, and there was a cap to match it, which my lady, after carefully brushing her hair on one side, put on.

In the bottom of the little trunk there was one article remaining, a shagreen case about six inches long. Lady Audrey put that in her bosom the very last thing. It was the season when days are short, and it was just dark enough to enable her to elude observation, when she softly opened her door, and crept out into the hall in which the gas had not yet been lighted.

The servants were mostly below stairs, and no one saw her, or, if they had a glimpse, never thought it was their beautiful and capricious mistress, going out upon the maddest errand her hot head and wild blood had ever tempted her into.

She knew what train to take for Esmond Castle, and she was bent upon going there.

She had money with her, and paid for her ticket boldly, and there was nothing so very singular in a boy of the age she seemed travelling alone the distance, but her desperate young face and glittering eyes made the clerk look at her keenly.

"Running away from school, or some deviltry, that youngster is up to," he muttered, "but it's none of my business."

It was a wild, cold night, but my lady's passionate thoughts kept her warm, perhaps.

When they reached Esmondton in the morning a cold, drizzling rain was falling, and the ground was covered with slushy, half-frozen snow, in which the foot sank deeply at every step. There was no conveyance to be had for Esmond Castle, not even a fly, and if there had been perhaps my lady would not have taken it. The bitter, cutting wind and sleet and the snow and ice under foot were nothing to her with her mountain rearing and in her wild mood.

She only thought:

"Angus is there, and she is there, and I must know the truth or I shall go mad."

The poor child had, however, over-rated her strength. The anxious life she had been living had, perhaps, enervated those little young muscles, which had once been strong.

Without sleep, without food, she struggled on, and all the while the fever in her swift blood was mounting to her brain hotter, and her temples throbbed fiercely. She grew blind, as it were, with a pain that seemed to sear her eyeballs, yet always before those eyes floated one vision—Sir Angus, her husband, holding to his heart the beautiful Lady Lucia Desmond.

The way was long and rugged. Without knowing it, she wandered from the path.

Icy shivers began to creep over the tired little frame, sharp pains like knives stabbed her as she walked.

"Oh, my darling," she began to murmur, while the tears rolled from her large eyes, "come to me; come!"

But only the wild shrieking of the wind through the tall trees answered her, and night was coming on.

She beheld at last a light streaming from some tall windows in the distance, and staggered towards it.

They were the windows of Esmond Castle. She had wandered all day, and only now reached it.

They were at dinner as the lady, in her boy's clothes, dragged herself up the terrace steps and close to the great, deep, plate-glass windows.

No one saw her, and they were very merry within there, the table covered with rich viands, and glittering with costly plate of gold and silver.

The black, wild eyes traversed the glowing board and settled at last upon the face they sought.

Sir Angus was, perhaps, that moment thinking of his young and idolised wife, for his eyes were down-cast, his fine brow overshadowed, and he evidently did not hear one word of what Lady Lucia Desmond, a lovely blonde who sat next him, was saying.

The desperate, despairing, fever-crazed eyes of Lady Audrey saw it all. To her Lady Lucia looked like a young goddess in her loveliness; and Sir Angus, with his handsome, sad face, seemed to be sunk in gloom over the fate that had bound him to another—to an ignorant, unformed child, whose freakish, selfish nature was a perpetual torment and mortification to him.

My lady felt in her bosom for the little shagreen case, and took out something that glittered sharp and cruel in the brilliant light.

Then she tried the low French windows. One was unfastened. They were so gay and so absorbed at the table that they never heard the sash open, nor saw the slight little form that slid through the aperture, hiding one hand, and watching with deadly, desperate eyes.

Sir Angus looked up, smiling at some remark of Lady Lucia's. The slender figure left the shadow of the silken curtains, and stole towards him, still hiding her hand.

The servants chanced mostly to be at the other side of the table. Several of them saw the childish figure, dripping with wet, its sad eyes fixed with such a terrible look upon Sir Angus.

They made a rush at the same moment, for all saw that something dreadful was about to happen.

But they stumbled over each other in their haste, and hindered one another.

Everybody at the table started wildly up, the ladies began to scream, and in the midst my lady's little hand closed upon Sir Angus's arm, her little dark, passionate face pressed close to him.

"Liar! cheat! thief!" she hissed, and raised her hand.

The knife descended—but it struck not her horror-stricken and miserable husband; it was buried in her own bosom.

(To be continued.)

PREVIOUS EPIDEMICS OF SMALL-POX IN LONDON.—The Registrar-General publishes some statistics of former visitations of small-pox in the metropolis which are worth recording. In the thirty-one years 1840-70 small-pox caused altogether 25,071 deaths in London; and the disease may be said to have been epidemic nine times during that period—namely, in 1840-1, 1844-5, 1847-8, 1851-2, 1854-5, 1859-60, 1862-4, 1866-7, and 1870-1. The greatest fatality was in 1844 and 1863, when 1804 and 1012 deaths respectively occurred. Nearly all the epidemic periods began in the autumn, and lasted from one to two years. The most severe visitation, although of comparatively short duration, was that of 1840-1, when the highest weekly mortality in the thirty-one years—namely 102 deaths in the last week of 1840—occurred. During the past nine weeks the deaths have averaged 152 per week, while in an equal number of weeks in 1840-1 the average was only 71 per week. The present epidemic is, therefore, far more severe than any previous one of which there is accurate record—that is, since the systematic registration of deaths was established.

SUBSTITUTES FOR WINTER KEEP FOR CATTLE.

—It has been recently remarked that the great difficulty which has been experienced by farmers during the present winter in procuring sufficient food for their cattle may have the effect of directing attention to fresh substitutes for the ordinary winter keep. Turnips and swedes have been a complete failure throughout a large breadth of the country, and the hay crop has been generally so deficient that many agriculturists have been already brought to the verge of ruin. In the Argentine Republic, as is well known, vast herds of cattle are reared upon the natural grasses of the pampas, or upon the lucerne which grows there in great abundance, but in the province of Catamarca both man and beast depend for support mainly upon the leaf and fruit of the algarrobo. It provides their principal stock of food during the winter months, and is said to be exceedingly nutritious. The algarrobo (*Hy-menaea Courbaril Jelaiba*) is indigenous to the country, and its fruit is gathered annually and stored with much care. The long pods are pounded in a wooden mortar, and the residuum is then passed through a sieve, and the meal converted into circular cakes, which after having been dried in the sun are fit for use. In this state it is called "patay," and is exported as a bread-stuff into other districts of the Republic, in some of which it forms

the exclusive food of the people. Its merits as a means for fattening cattle are also thoroughly appreciated, and it might be a great boon to our farmers if the Accolmatization Society would ascertain whether the algarrobo might not be introduced into this country with advantage. The tree grows to a height of forty feet, with wide-spreading branches, and a rather slender stem, and flourishes best upon a dry soil.

PLOT AND COUNTER-PLOT.

CHAPTER IV.

Therewith they 'gan, furious and fell,
To thunder blows, and fiercely to assail
Each other. Spenser.

THE dwelling of Spartannus, as we have seen, adjoined his stables, and overlooked the court of the Temple of Neptune. It was evening, and the charioteer was seated in one of his retired apartments; but he was not alone. Adonia was there; and by her side, holding one of her hands, sat Prince Julian.

Julian was an orphan, descended from one of the oldest and best families of the empire. His patrician blood was undisputed, and he was one of the few among the nobility whom the people had loved and honoured for manifest goodness and virtue. He was young—not more than five-and-twenty—and the very picture of manly strength and beauty. On his father's side he had inherited the bold and striking outlines of the Roman physiognomy, while from his mother he had received the ennobling and softening influence of the Greek—from his mother, too, he had received that instruction which had led him to accept the Christian religion.

He had met Adonia, and he had loved her. Though there was obscurity about her birth, yet it was very evident that she was of patrician stock. However, that consideration could not have weighed with Julian after he had learned to know the maiden's worth. That Adonia should have returned his love was no marvel. They were both orphans, and they were both Christians, and the knitting of their hearts into the web of absorbing love followed close upon their near acquaintance. Their love was of no common type. It was emotional enough to hold them in a calm and tranquil ecstasy, but underlying it was a profound and sacred appreciation of true worth, leading each to hold the other in reverence and esteem.

In a corner of the room sat Victor, the bondman, nodding as though ready to fall asleep, but a close observer might have detected that the light of his sharp gray eyes was bright, and that his ears were open.

"Do not fear, sweet one," said the prince, gazing earnestly and persuasively into the maiden's face. "Put away your trouble and be at peace. I do not think they will look for you here."

"But why should they look for me at all?" asked Adonia, with a tremulous glance around her. "What can the queen want with me?"

"That is more than I can tell," responded Julian. "It is as strange and unaccountable to me as it is to you. Perhaps our good Spartannus can enlighten us."

The charioteer nodded, and, after a moment's thought, replied:

"I doubt not that Octavia hath some weighty reason for wishing to see our fair lady, though I cannot divine it. The queen, however, is not at the bottom of this. She knows nothing of Adonia save what hath been told to her by another."

"That other—"

"Is the imperial envoy."

"That, to me, is more incomprehensible still," said Julian. "What can move the Roman dignitary in such a direction?"

"Vangorgon is not a Roman, my lord."

"But he passes for such. He is surely an envoy from the emperor."

"Yes," said the charioteer. "He would not dare to assume that character if it did not belong to him."

"My good Spartannus, will you not tell us what you know of him?"

After a little reflection the athlete said:

"As this man hath planted himself in an evil attitude towards you, and as you may have occasion to resist him, I will tell you something of his history. He doubtless thinks that time and the change of station have so altered him that acquaintances of other years will not recognise him; but I knew him the moment I put my eyes upon him. He is a Carthaginian of Catana, and was, in his youth, a page in waiting upon the first Glaucus."

"The grandfather of this Glaucus?" queried Adonia.

"Yes. Upon the death of Glaucus, and the accession of Valentinus to the throne, he entered the service of that monarch, and became his chamberlain and confidential friend; and not only so, but he won the confidence of his queen, and became, in time, the confidant of Octavia. He remained with

Valentinus and Octavia until trouble arose, then he went to Rome. Of that trouble I knew something at the time. I was the king's chief charioteer, had access to the palace at all times, and was in the confidence of all the servants. Valentinus was jealous of his chamberlain; and, Heaven knows, he had occasion; but what the real occasion was the poor king did not know. He looked in the wrong direction. He fancied that his wife loved the dark-faced Carthaginian; but it was not so. The villain had a far deeper purpose in view than the gaining of the queen's love. How far he succeeded at that time the future has yet to tell, for his plot had been well matured, and he had made a bold and desperate stroke. But he was at length obliged to flee for his life. That he has turned his wits to good account in Rome his present office testifies. That was almost a score of years ago. He was younger then, but time has not changed him as it changes some men. I see in him the same viper as of old."

"Does the queen know him in his present guise, think you?" asked Julian, who had listened with deepest interest.

"She certainly knows what she sees, and what she has seen. She must know that the Roman envoy of to-day was the chamberlain of other times; but there are some things which she does not know. She is deep and profound in her plottings; but Vangorgon holds a secret which she little dreams of."

Both the prince and Adonia regarded the charioteer for a time in silence, while Victor, in his corner, nodded as before. At length the former spoke:

"Spartannus, are you willing to tell us more of this strange matter?"

"I can tell you no more at present."

"But more is known to you?"

"Ay. I know that which Octavia would give her own right hand to know, and which would cause the envoy to quake with deadly fear if he but suspected my knowledge. But the time has not yet come for the revelation. Though they know very little of me, I have a hold upon them by which I can at any moment bring them to bitter grief. Would to Heaven I had the power to cast the shield of my knowledge between them and their victims everywhere; but I have not. My secret only enables me to stand between them and certain individuals. Of the envoy alone I have no fear whatever; but in so far as he may influence and connive with the queen he is dangerous. The poor young king evidently knows him only for what he now appears—an accredited minister of the Roman emperor, and, as such, a man to be respected and feared. As for Octavia, be sure she will not whisper his secret, for there are many people in Messina who will not recognise in our imperial envoy the Carthaginian Hamlikar, whom they have bitter occasion to remember."

"Hamlikar!" repeated the prince, in surprise. "Do you mean that this envoy—this man calling himself Vangorgon—is that same young officer of Valentinus's court of whom I heard so much in my boyhood?"

"The very same, my lord."

Adonia arose, and moved to the charioteer's side. "Good Spartannus," she said, beseechingly. "I pray you tell me—is there in my life anything in common with this Carthaginian plotter?"

"My sweet lady," replied the host, taking her hand as he spoke, "between that man and your pure self there is no relation in law or justice."

"But," urged the maiden, "he has some evil plot in hand in which I am concerned. Is it not so?"

"Adonia," the charioteer answered, with solemn assurance in his look and tone, "Vangorgon—for as such we must now know him—hath doubtless laid a plot in which he seeks to involve you; but rest assured that I have laid a counter-plot which will give him trouble."

"I know your goodness of heart, and your strength of arm, and I know, too, that you are my friend; but," cried Adonia, grasping his hand eagerly, "I cannot forget that the envoy of the emperor, backed by the queen, with all the royal guard at his disposal, is an enemy not to be easily overcome."

"Dear lady, I have but one assurance to give you:—Trust me!"

At this moment Victor started from his nodding posture, and in a second afterwards leaped to his feet.

"Hark!" he whispered. "I hear the tramp of feet and the clank of arms in the court of the stable."

The charioteer sprang to the door and opened it. Beyond was a narrow passage, opening on the one hand into a small inner court or garden, and, on the other, by a broader way, into the court of the stable, where the chariots were kept. By this latter way he approached the larger court, and just as he had reached the door opening thereto, an opposite door, opening from the stable, was burst furiously open, and he caught sight of the flash of arms in the

lamp light. He distinguished one dark form—the form of him who led the intruders—then he hastened back to the apartment he had left.

"Victor," he said to the bondman, speaking very quickly, but yet calmly and distinctly, "you know the way to my wine vaults?"

"Yes."

"Then take Adonia under your guidance, and hasten down there. Stop not to question me, but go!"

"But, good Spartannus—"

"Hush! dear lady. Speak not, but follow Victor with all speed. If you love Julian, and would preserve your own life, go! Away, Victor. Julian and I will be with you presently."

Thus speaking, the charioteer threw open a small door from the face of the inner wall, and when Adonia and Victor had passed through he closed it, then turned to the prince.

"Julian," he said, "the Roman envoy has come upon us; and as he heads a detachment of the royal guards we may be assured that he is invested with royal authority."

"With authority from the queen, you mean," returned Julian.

"She may be the guiding spirit; but be sure the king's countenance hath been secured, or the royal guard would not be here."

"But," persisted Julian, upon whom the matter came with bewildering effect, "Glaucus is my friend."

"Oh, Julian, you know not Glaucus, because Glaucus is not himself. You are known as a Christian; and I tell you that the war of extermination hath been declared by Domitian. If we are taken, we die; and a worse fate than death will await the fair Adonia. A fiend is loose!"

At this juncture the sound of heavy feet was heard in the passage of the stable court.

"Will you defend yourself?" asked Spartannus.

Julian knew in his heart that Spartannus was his friend, and that he could tell no lie, and he quickly answered:

"Yes, to the last drop of my blood, if necessary."

"Good! Then here we will take our stand. I will guard the door, and should any succeed in passing me, be ready to receive them. Be cool and firm, and remember that we have promised to rejoin our friends below."

Spartannus had taken a heavy sword from the wall, and the prince drew his own weapon.

By this time the intruders had found their way into the narrow passage, and as the charioteer had thrown the door open the light of his hanging lamp enabled them to make sure of their steps. Vangorgon was present with the force, and he acted the part of the wise captain, sending the soldiers in advance, while he directed the movements from the rear.

"Who comes there?" demanded the charioteer as the party approached the door.

"Officers from the king," was the response.

"What is your business?"

"Our business is first to apprehend Spartannus the charioteer."

"Back! Back! Advance another step and you are a dead man!"

This to the foremost soldier; then to Julian he hurriedly added:

"Remember, we cover the retreat of Adonia!"

"I remember!" said the prince.

"Beware, Spartannus!" spoke Vangorgon, from the rear. "I come with an order from the king for your arrest. Resistance will be death."

"I respect my king," replied Spartannus; "but I have no respect for the foul and wicked spirit which would inspire him with cruelty to his own people. As for thee, thou base—"

He did not finish the sentence. The foremost soldier had rushed upon him, aiming a furious blow as he did so. But the attempt was of no avail. The charioteer struck down the blade, and, with a quick lunge, he ran the soldier through the body. As Spartannus withdrew his sword the stricken man staggered and fell forward into the room.

Seeing his comrade thus fall, another of the soldiers, fired with vengeance, sprang to the conflict, but only to be hurled back with the charioteer's sword driven deep into his temple.

The roof of the passage was too low to admit of swinging blows, and when the herculean champion had stricken down the third man, which he did by a thrust in the bosom, the assailants, seeing their disadvantage, even against a single arm, drew back.

"On! on!" shouted Vangorgon. "Cut down the plebeian dog!"

But the soldiers did not move. There were but four of them left, and they knew too well with whom they had to contend. They had known at first of the charioteer's surpassing prowess, but they had not known how far he would dare to make opposition to a royal mandate.

"Guards!" cried the envoy, in a towering passion, "forward! I command you! If you disobey, I swear, by the gods, you shall die by the hand of the executioner!"

This threat, coming from the imperial envoy, startled the soldiers into action. They knew full well that if they were reported to the queen as cowards—as having, through fear, refused to do her behest—their heads would be food for the axe. So, with one accord, and with blind desperation, they made a rush for the apartment within which the athlete stood.

The foremost man was a stout, burly fellow, and as luck would have it, the charioteer's sword-point glanced upon his helmet, and he pressed into the room; but his luck was but an evil one, for no sooner had he come to a stand than the blade of the prince found him, and laid him low. Spartacus observed what had been done behind him, and the next man he smote with unerring aim.

There were now but two of the soldiers left, and they might both have lived had they turned back in season. One of them, in wild rage, attempted to overcoerce the charioteer by plunging forward between his legs, and thus overturning him and getting in his rear. How his plan might have succeeded had there been no other party concerned we cannot say. As it was the adventurer's head offered a tempting mark to Julian's sword, and the mark was not missed.

This unseemly jostle served to arouse the charioteer from his calm propriety, and with the pommel of his sword he dashed at the remaining soldier, uttering a dire threat of vengeance as he did so. But the solitary soldier was wise, as was the envoy, for both of them hurried off as fast as their legs would carry them. The charioteer followed to the outer door; when he saw that the fugitives had crossed the court and disappeared, he returned to the room, where he found the prince gazing upon the bodies that lumbered the floor.

"This is heavy work, my lord," said Spartacus. "It may prove a costly work for us," returned Julian, dubiously. "The envoy will hasten to the palace with his report, and we may expect a centurion's host down upon us."

"Have no present fears on that account, my lord. They will find little upon my premises to reward them for their trouble."

"But they will find us, good Spartacus. Whither can we flee?"

"Be sure I have not ventured upon this work without counting the cost," said the charioteer, with a confident nod. "Wait you here a single moment. I have a bag of gold which I will not leave to tempt the cupidity of the king's servants."

Spartacus went into an adjacent closet, where he secured the bag in question, after which he returned and lighted a small lantern.

"Now," said he, "I am ready."

"Which way go we?"

"To the vaults."

"But," ventured Julian, in surprise, "will you leave the way open behind you? Will you not secure the doors between here and the street?"

"Nay, my lord. Palpable doors may be broken down; and were our pursuers to find our doors fastened on this side, they would suspect more than I wish them to suspect. Follow me, and take courage."

"Lead on. I trust you as I would trust my own father."

Spartacus opened the small door in the rear wall, through which Adonia and Victor had made their exit, and when the prince had passed, he followed, and closed up the way behind him. They were now in a narrow arched passage, and at a short distance they found a flight of stone steps, which led to the vaults below. The charioteer led in the descent, holding his lantern well up so that his companion might make no mis-step upon the uncertain footway.

CHAPTER V.

Thou art come to answer
A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch
Incapable of pity. Merchant of Venice.

GLAUCUS, the king, was with his mother when the Roman envoy returned. He had waited that he might see Adonia, for he had heard of her as a maiden of marvellous beauty.

"Now, Vangorgon," said the queen, eagerly, "we will see the girl first. You may bring her hither."

The envoy gasped and stammered.

"How? Is she hidden beyond your reach?"

"In truth, royal lady, I have been thwarted again."

"By whom?"

"By the charioteer."

"Oh, shame! You claim to be a man!"

"Were your soldiers men whom you sent with me?" demanded Vangorgon.

"Ay—they were."

"Then know that six of them have met this same charioteer, and have fallen before him."

"Ha!" exclaimed the king, starting up. "Say that again."

"I say, sire, that six of the seven soldiers who ac-

companied me upon my mission have fallen by the hand of the charioteer Spartacus."

"By his hand alone?"

"I saw no other; but the soldier who escaped with me is sure he saw Prince Julian at the charioteer's back."

"Saw you not the girl?" said Octavia.

"No. I am sure she was not in sight, though I fancy she was not far off."

"By the gods!" swore Glaucus, "this is passing strange. This man must be a very Hercules. Did he fight fairly?"

"He had great advantage, sire, as he defended a narrow passage. If there had been room for concert of action we might have captured him."

"Look ye, my son," demanded the queen, with fiery zeal, "what will you do?"

"I will have the charioteer arrested. But tell me first, my mother, why you would have the maiden brought hither."

"It is my pleasure, Glaucus."

"And it is my pleasure," retorted the king, violently, "to know what you want with her. If you would have my aid, you must inform me upon this point."

Octavia's eyes flashed fire, and she would have spoken angrily had she dared; but she knew that her son could be stubborn when he chose, and, conquering her passion, she replied:

"My dear son, you are unnecessarily curious. My first and chief desire to see this girl was that I might obtain from her information touching her family. She is of an old family of Falerii, so Vangorgon informed me, and you know that I have an interest in that quarter. But I am free to confess that a second desire, stronger than the first, for the damsel's presence has arisen. Her contumacy has angered me."

"I can well understand that desire," said Glaucus, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone. "But," he added, turning towards the envoy, "what has our imperial master's very good friend to do with the lady?"

"I know her family well, sire. Her parents are dead, and her proper guardian is an uncle—a priest of Neptune, in Rome—who has commissioned me to bring her to him."

"Upon my life," cried the king, shaking off his moody fit, "I dislike to send so much beauty away from my capital; but I will not interfere. Take her when and where you can find her. As for this charioteer, I'll send off a centurion for him at once. He is dangerous."

"Let me suggest, sire," ventured Vangorgon, "that you make no delay in the matter. Spartacus has numerous friends who would readily connive at his escape if time and opportunity were afforded."

"A centurion's host shall be ready anon, and you may try your hand again."

"I, sire?"

"Yes. You know where you left the culprit, and you can best find him; and, moreover, the business hath grown from your own planting."

The envoy said that he was willing to undertake the completion of the work; after that the monarch withdrew.

"Now," spoke the queen as soon as the door had safely closed upon the retiring king, "I would know the truth about this girl. Vangorgon, I want the whole truth. Do not think to deceive me."

"Royal lady," answered the envoy, with his hand upon his heart, "it is as I have told you. This Adonia was the daughter of a woman of Falerii. The father was an officer in the service of the emperor, who died, I think, before his child was born. The mother removed with her infant to Messina, where she fell ill, and died shortly after. When dying she gave her child to me, and bade me keep it and rear it."

"She must have had great confidence in you," said the queen, with a perceptible curl of the lip.

"I can say nothing of her confidence," returned the envoy, promptly; "but I can assure your royal ladyship that she was not the only woman who chose to flatter and smile upon the adventurous Carthaginian."

Octavia bit her lip, and Vangorgon proceeded:

"But no more of that. You know why I left Messina eighteen years ago. There is no need that the king should be admitted to our secret. I can only remind you that when your royal husband banished me so summarily from his realm I was forced to leave the child behind. You may remember that Valentinus was jealous of me."

Octavia stamped her foot upon the floor, and her eyes flashed fire, as she replied:

"Silence, sir! I used you then for a purpose. The folly of my husband arose from his own weakness. Let the past be forgotten. The king shall not know—he must not—that you were ever in the service of his father; and much less must the name you then bore be whispered in our court. Your present business on behalf of my imperial brother is important, and shall be held in the foreground. Meantime, my friend, you shall have the girl."

Vangorgon's brow had been dark and lowering at the opening of Octavia's speech, but at its close his face cleared, and he took her hand impulsively.

"You will bear me out in all measures necessary to her arrest and detention?"

"I promise."

"Then, royal lady, I, in turn, promise that not a Christian—"

The envoy was interrupted in his speech by the entrance of the king.

"Now, Vangorgon," said Glaucus, "you may have force enough; you will acknowledge that I am paying great respect to my imperial uncle in thus assisting his servant. In the court are a hundred men, ready to your order; the centurion in command has direction from me to submit in all things to your authority. Go, bring back the charioteer."

The envoy promised to do his best, and when he had gone the king seated himself, and motioned for his mother to do the same. For some moments they gazed upon each other in silence, their looks showing that there was something of more than ordinary import upon their minds. The king was the first to speak.

"Now, my mother, let us return to the business we had in hand when Vangorgon interrupted us. You were upon the point of communicating your thoughts. What were they?"

Octavia looked steadily into the face of her son as though with her own firmness she would inspire him, and in a low, whispered voice, she said:

"The purpose of Domitian is known to you. He wills the extermination of these Christians."

"I have been so informed on a previous occasion," said Glaucus, uneasily.

"Do you realise the necessity?"

"I realise the necessity of retaining the friendship of the emperor."

"But your duty to—"

"Hush! Don't speak that word in connection with this work. How many of the Christians would you have blotted out?"

"Every soul of them!"

"But there are thousands of them in my realm."

"So much the more necessity for the work; and so much the more honour in the result."

"But among these Christians are many good men and true. Such a work would be horrible."

"Glaucus, are you a coward?"

The youthful monarch started, and his wasted hands were clutched with a spasmodic grip.

"Speak not that word to me, mother!"

"I will not, for I know you fear not to do your duty. I say unto you—Every Christian in Messina must die! They may appear to walk fairly in outer life; but they are not to be trusted. If you would make your throne firm beneath you, you must exterminate them utterly. Do this, and Domitian will bless you."

The king gazed upon his mother for a time with a vacant stare, then, starting up, paced to and fro across the apartment. His face was deadly pale, and he wore a frightened look. That very day he had sworn most solemnly to the philosopher Tacitus that the Christians should be protected; but he could not forget that to his mother and Vangorgon he had as solemnly pledged himself that the behest of the emperor should be obeyed.

"Glaucus," spoke the scheming woman as her son approached her, "do you know that the blood of the Caesars runs in your veins?"

"You have told me so," replied the king, with a flush of pride.

"Ay, my son, you inherit it from me. You are my only child, and Domitian has no children. Will you be the last of your race?"

"What mean you by that?" asked Glaucus, stopping, and returning his mother's fixed gaze.

"I mean," said Octavia, solemnly, "to ask you if you would be the last of your house. Such will be the result if the Christians be not swept off. They are multiplying, and they are aspiring. Will you tamely relinquish the sceptre into their hands?"

"You know that while I live I will be king."

"And would you not live to have children, and to them transmit your royal sceptre?"

"Ay—thou knowest it."

"Then sweep away this dangerous sect. Remember—the emperor expects it—he demands it—but I would have him believe that you do it of your own free will and accord."

"All of them?—all?"

"The work must be thoroughly done, if it be done at all."

"Well, well," uttered the ill-starred monarch, utterly wearied with the burden of the distasteful business, "if they must die, so let it be. When is the blow to be struck?"

"Not yet, my son. When the time comes you shall know. Remember your pledge."

"It will not be easily forgotten."

"It must not be forgotten," added the queen, impressively. "It is in your power to make your throne strong and secure. You have friends who will stand by you. Vangorgon, as the envoy of the em-

peror, must be honoured and respected; and, in return, he will exert a wondrous power in our behalf. But if we longer shield the Christians, who are plotting treason throughout the empire, a terrible fate will be ours."

"Will Domitian be so vindictive if we show mercy to the Nazarenes?"

"You are yet blind! Do you fancy that the Christians, if they be suffered to multiply, will long rest subject to Pagan rule? They have a prince of their own people, whom they would gladly exalt to the throne. But," the queen continued, taking her son by the arm, "you have a nearer danger to fear. Your father had a nephew, and that nephew is now in command of your armies. Caius Hadrian is brave and noble, and the people have confidence in him; he is known to hate the Christians. Beware, Glaucus, that your own subjects do not—"

"Stop!" cried the king, shrinking away from his mother's touch as though a serpent had hissed in his ear.

"Be assured," added Octavia, persuasively, "that Caius does not wish you ill, and I know that he would die in your service most willingly, if thereby he might bless the realm. But Messina must have a king who is true to her ancient laws and traditions. Remember that Caius is the idol of the soldiers. Remember how emperors have been made at Rome. The demand of the hour is that this treasonable element be removed. Will you do it, or will you risk the consequences of forcing—"

"Stop!" said the king.

His fear and pride had been touched. He knew but too well all that his mother would say of the love of the soldiers for his cousin, and of the possible things that might result to him if he left work for others to do which he had no heart for. He strode across the room, and when he came back he stood before the queen with his arms folded over his breast. His lips were tightly compressed; his brow lowered; his dark eyes gleamed with a preternatural brightness; and his feet were planted firmly, as though ready for any shock.

"Mother," he said, in a low, icy tone, "I can be as great a villain as any man of them all. Caius's trade of blood hath not given him a hand more ready for the work than is mine. Of my people, if left to their own free will and instinct, I am not afraid; but I know that I must appease my imperial uncle. I know that his heart is a living Tophet, and that his head is a reeking pest-house, wherein most wicked things are hatched. Not only the Christians but the Jews he would exterminate. He would cut off all who worship the one living and true God!"

"Glaucus, thou art mad!"

"No, no, my mother. I am entirely in my senses—I am the very self you have made me; and to prove to you that your work has been well done, and that you have reared up a son after your own heart, I do now most solemnly pledge myself that every Christian and every Jew in my realm shall perish! If necessary, the very streets shall run with blood, and blood shall flow in abundance. Will that suit you?"

Octavia was not a woman to let an opportunity slip. With a quick movement she caught her son by the arm, and her eyes gleamed more brightly than did his.

"Glaucus, do you mean what you say?"

She asked it in a hushed, hissing whisper.

"I mean it!" responded the king, solemnly.

"Then your throne is safe and firm beneath you."

Glaucus shook off the hand of his mother, turned from her, and left the chamber; from that moment he was a haunted man. He had wooed a grim demon that went with him whithersoever he walked—that sat with him when he sat—and that visited him in dreams when he slept.

Octavia, fit sister of the wily tyrant Domitian, felt only triumph in the success of her scheming. It mattered not to her that she had made a demon of her son, so that her ends were answered. She fancied that history would present her to the Pagan world as a heroine, and the gods would celebrate her victories. The hour was not yet come for her awakening.

She paced to and fro, revolving the dark and vengeful work in her mind, until the sentinel in the great tower struck upon the alarm bell the stroke of midnight. As the last reverberations were dying away upon the startled air the Roman envoy stood again in her presence; but there was no sign of triumph upon his evil face.

"Vangorgon! Is it you?"

"It is I."

"Where is the girl—Adonia?"

"I know not."

"Have you not found her?"

"No."

"Found you not the charioteer?"

"Not even a trace of one of them. They have disappeared as if by magic. I repaired with the centurion to the dwelling of the charioteer, where we found the doors open and the inmates gone. We inquired of all whom we felt safe in addressing,

but nothing had been seen of them. It is wonderful."

"Never mind," said Octavia, after a pause. "I will take the business into my own hands. I care little for the maiden, save that I have conceived a strong desire to see her; but her princely lover I would secure at all hazards."

"If your gracious majesty would but leave the maiden to me," ventured Vangorgon, "I think I should be able to secure her in due time. She is not worth trouble to you."

The queen looked sharply into the envoy's face. What she thought or what she suspected might not be judged from her angular features, for their shades did not always vary with her feelings. But it was plain to be seen upon the envoy's face that he was in trouble. In truth, he had not originally intended that the business of his search for Adonia should be known at the royal palace at all; it was by the merest accident that the queen had discovered the direction of his attention in that quarter. When, however, she had gained his secret he professed at once to admit her to his confidence. Yet he had hoped to get the maiden in his power without exposing the matter farther. But now he was becoming alarmed, if one might judge by his uneasy look. The queen had become too interested in Adonia to suit his plans.

"I can secure the girl in good time," he added, after a pause. "You have enough else to occupy your thoughts."

"Peace, Vangorgon!" said Octavia, with a stamp of her foot. "I love not to be thwarted. I sent for this girl, and she has eluded me. I have resolved to see her."

"In the name of mercy, royal lady, I hope you will do the girl no harm."

"You are blind, sir envoy. Why should I harm the damsel? In plain terms, I have good reason for wishing to see her, since you have told me that Julian is her lover. This Prince Julian is a chief pillar among the Christians; he is also a bosom friend of Theophilus, and Theophilus is the repository of all Christian lore. Now lovers are apt to deal out their secrets to those whom they love, and Julian may have whispered many things into Adonia's ears which it would benefit us to know. Do you comprehend?"

"Yes, royal lady—I comprehend."

"The prospect does not seem to please you, however."

"Mistake not the cloud upon my face, lady. Remember that I have been sorely tried and perplexed. I am angered with thoughts of the charioteer."

"He shall not long escape us, sir envoy. Retire now, and rest, and on the morrow I will put my hand to the work."

Vangorgon turned away, and when he was alone he reproached himself for having permitted the queen to know anything of Adonia.

CHAPTER VI.

There a temple in ruins stands
Fashioned by long-forgotten hands Byron.

WHEN Spartanus and Julian had reached the vaults they found Victor and Adonia waiting for them there. The maiden, when she saw her lover, sprang forward and caught him by the arm; but in a moment more, as the rays from the lantern fell upon his toga, she beheld the dark spots that stained it, and uttered an exclamation of alarm.

"It is blood! I heard the clash of arms. Oh, Julian, have they done you harm?"

"Not a scratch, dearest."

"This is not the place for explanations," interposed the charioteer. "We shall find opportunity for that anon. We must prepare now for a long and devious walk. If, at any point, the way should seem difficult and dubious, remember the prize for which we venture; also remember that you have a true and trusty friend for a guide. Victor, you will take the lantern; and be sure that you lose it not."

Having thus spoken, Spartanus led the way to the farthest corner of the cellar, where he entered a vault upon the walls of which were shelves of cedar, bearing jars and bottles. One of these shelves he removed, and, having brushed away the dirt from that part of the wall which had been covered by the edge of the board, a slight crevice was exposed in the rock. Into this the charioteer inserted the blade of his dagger, and directly afterwards a section of the wall fell back, as though revolving upon pivots, disclosing a passage to some place beyond.

"Pass in," said Spartanus, "and fear not. I will bring up the rear, and secure the way behind us."

When they had all entered, and the secret door had been shut, the charioteer lighted a second lantern which he had brought with him, remarking as he did so:

"We must thus provide against accident, for we should fare but badly in this place without light."

Meantime Julian had been gazing in wonder upon the massive masonry of which the walls of the crypt were composed. In the distance he saw niches in

the rock, and within them were human skeletons, clad in grimy, mouldy vestments, secured by cords in an upright position.

"In the name of wonder, good Spartanus, what manner of place is this?"

"Do you not see?" returned the guide.

"I see that this crypt hath the appearance of a catacomb; yonder I observe a passage which seems to lead away into farther depths."

"That seeming is a reality, my lord. These subterranean chambers are more extensive than I can tell you."

"But," urged Julian, "I never heard of them. Is their existence generally known?"

"I think," replied Spartanus, "that, of men now living, I am the only one who has a knowledge of them."

With a woman's gentle tact Adonia persuaded the charioteer to tell them how he had found the hidden place, and what he thought of its origin and use.

"I hit upon the secret by accident," he said. "The rats had made a nest upon that same shelf which you saw me remove, and in clearing away the rubbish which they had left behind them I discovered a crevice in the rock, and in attempting to clean it out with a knife blade I hit a secret spring, which event was followed by the opening of the passage as you saw it done. That was four years ago; from that time I have made such explorations as time and opportunity have afforded, meanwhile keeping the secret to myself."

"Who," asked Adonia, "do you imagine howled out these deep chambers?"

"It must have been done by the Greeks in the early days of the city," said the charioteer.

"Doubtless the first excavations were made by the priests of Neptune for purposes of sepulture; for I have found traces of burial in several places; but the extended ramifications of the deep passages must have been continued for mystic purposes; I have no doubt that the secret of their existence was buried with the last of the Athenian line of priests. But that is only a supposition. I know that the crypts are here; and I am assured that the secret belongs to me and my friends."

Thus speaking, Spartanus led the way through a narrow passage into another chamber, where there were more niches, and more human remains.

"We are now," he said, "directly beneath the temple, and there is a secret door opening from this place into one of the vaults used even now by the priests, but they have no thought of what is beyond their own crypts."

After traversing numerous other passages, most of them low and narrow, they came to a broad chamber, from which there were several outlets.

"Here," said the guide, "we are beneath the old Temple of Jupiter, and yonder is a passage which leads directly to the vaults of the royal palace."

"Can you gain ingress to the palace by that way?" asked Julian.

"Yes," replied Spartanus. "I have done it ere this, and may do it again."

"You are sure," said Adonia, "that no one else knows of these wonderful passages?"

"I have traversed them many times," answered the charioteer, "and have never yet found a human track, save my own, made by the present generation. Be sure our enemies will never trace us here."

Still the explorers pursued the devious way, at times being forced to move with extreme caution, and anon finding passages broad and fair. At various points Spartanus called the attention of his companions to objects of interest, offering such explanations as he was able to do.

"There," said he, pointing to a passage which they left behind them, "is a way to the old Greek prison. I have explored the strong dungeons, and looked through the torture chambers. It is a terrible place."

"I have visited it," said Julian, "though I entered by courtesy, as a visitor, by the upper door. Heaven grant that I may never find myself a prisoner within its noisome confines!"

At the expiration of an hour or more, they reached a point where the passage branched off in two directions, and here the guide hesitated.

"The way to the left," he said, "leads outside the walls of the city. I think we had better take it."

Both Julian and Adonia assented to the proposition, and Spartanus directed his steps accordingly.

At length the lateral passages disappeared, and for a long distance they traversed a direct, vaulted way, until finally they arrived at a point where there were five branches.

"We are beyond the limits of the city—so far beyond that the presence of enemies is not probable," said Spartanus as he stopped at this fivefold division. "I have been thus far but once before, and then I took the middle passage, and it led me to a cellar well stocked with wine and provisions. If you have a mind, we will risk that way now."

"We can but try it," said Julian; "and if we find difficulty in our way, we can come back."

The middle passage was accordingly taken, and ere long they came to what appeared to be a solid face of rock entirely shutting up the way; but Spartanus, on the former occasion, had found a concealed door, like unto the one beneath his own abode, and without difficulty he set it open, and passed through, his companions following with extreme caution. They now found themselves in a wide cellar, with vaulted roof, and flanked by arches of massive masonry, within which were stored large casks and jars. As soon as they had entered the cellar the guide carefully closed up the secret way, and when the rock had been swung back into its place no trace of a possible break in the ponderous masonry was distinguishable.

"Now what?" queried Julian.

"Up we go," answered Spartanus; "and if danger come, we must meet it. If we tread lightly we shall run but little risk; for it must be now well on to midnight, and all honest ears in this region should be closed."

The charioteer led the way up a flight of wooden stairs, Julian and Adonia following side by side, while Victor brought up the rear. At the head was a door, which was opened without trouble. Beyond was a large room which proved to be a kitchen, and opposite their place of entrance they found a door which opened into a court. It was bolted upon the inside, so the fastenings were removed without noise, and they passed out into the open air. This court was bounded on two sides by the house, and on two other sides by a high, thick wall; but they found a postern which was easily opened from within, and having passed this our adventurers were free. They looked back upon the building they had left, and found it to be a straggling pile of white stone, or stucco, situated upon the slope of a hill, and in the distance they could see the towers and turrets of the city looming above the intervening foliage.

The prince had just spoken to his companion, when a low growl was heard from the direction of the court, and in a moment more a huge dog bounded out with a sharp howl of warning. Adonia uttered a quick cry of alarm, for the animal was plunging directly towards her; but without touching her he stopped and sniffed the air an instant, then turned towards the charioteer, and when he had reached him, he crouched down and whined imploringly.

"Leo!"

As Spartanus pronounced the name the dog leaped up with a cry of joy, and placed his paws upon the speaker's bosom.

"Mercy on us!" ejaculated the stout guide, "I think we are safe enough. This is my brave dog Leo which I sold, not six months ago, to Fabian, the vine-dresser. He is a Christian, I am very sure, and of him I have bought all my wine and fruit for years. If this is his house we shall find a safe shelter here for the present. I'll make the trial, at all events."

Accordingly he knocked smartly upon the gate; presently an upper window was opened, and a head was thrust out.

"Who comes hither at this unseemly hour?" the owner of the head demanded.

"One who knows where to find good wine and a true heart," answered the applicant.

"Now may Heaven save us! that is Spartanus's voice!"

"Thou art right, good Fabian. Friends, good and true, are with me, and we seek shelter."

"Bless me! this is a strange hour for you and your friends to be wandering hitherward. But you shall be welcome, nevertheless. I will be with you anon."

With this the man disappeared from the window, and ere long appeared at the gate. He held a lighted lamp in his hand, and its beams fell upon a face kind and genial, with a flanking of iron-gray hair around it.

"Zounds!" he exclaimed, when he had recognised the charioteer, "you might have entered my house without the asking, had you tried; for my servant had left every bolt and bar out of place. But come in, come in. Bless me! Spartanus—stout, brave Spartanus—I am glad to see you. And these friends—who are they?"

"Let us gain shelter, my good friend, and you shall know all about them."

So our party were ushered into the house, and as the night dew was heavy and chill, the old vine-dresser lighted a fire in a chafin-dish, by which Adonia was glad to dry her feet. After this the host produced wine and cups, and when the guests had drunk, he asked the charioteer what had brought him forth into the country at that hour of the night.

"Fabian," said Spartanus, with solemn accent, "you honour and revere our ancient religion?"

"How?" uttered the vine-dresser, with a surprised look.

"You still bow down to the gods of the Romans?"

"Good Spartanus, what mean you? You do not worship the heathen gods?"

"You know not what I worship."

"Well, well; thou art an honest man, Spartanus—I know that."

"And thou art a Christian, good Fabian?"

"Thou hast spoken truly—I am."

"And thou, too, Fabian, hast spoken truly. We are all Christians here. So give us thy hand."

A grasp that might have crushed an ordinary hand followed this avowal, after which the charioteer said:

"Thou knowest, as well as I, the spirit of the Roman tyrant Domitian. Thou knowest that he is persecuting the Christians with fiendish and unrelenting cruelty. Bear this in mind, and thou wilt comprehend the situation as I proceed."

Thereupon Spartanus went on to tell of the coming of the envoy Vangorion—of his conniving with the queen against Adonia—of the attempt to abduct the maiden, and of his own interposition—of the coming of the envoy, with a detachment of the royal guard, for the arrest of all three of them—of their overcoming the soldiers, and their subsequent escape.

"The royal edict has been issued against both Adonia and the prince," he concluded. "If they be apprehended, the result can be easily imagined. For the present, good Fabian, you must give the lady shelter beneath your roof, and also give harbour to the prince, if he desires."

"You shall be amply rewarded," said Julian.

The old vine-dresser cast upon the youth a look of reproach.

"You know me not, my lord, if you deem that the hope of temporal reward is needed to incite me to Christian duty. You and the lady shall have such rest and refuge here as my poor house affords; and I have no doubt that I can make you safe. At all events, I will dare the enmity of the Pagan in your behalf."

Julian and Adonia returned their thanks as well as they were able; after this the host set out bread and meat, and warmed some wine upon the fire; and, when his guests had eaten and drunk, he turned to the charioteer with a look of deep concern upon his face.

"Good Spartanus, you are a man of observation, and your opportunities are many. Can you tell me the meaning of the mutterings that reach my ears? What is to be the end of these things?"

"Blood, my Fabian, blood!"

The old man clenched his hands upon his knees, and a shudder crept through his frame.

"You mean that the dreadful spirit of Domitian is to find office in Messina?"

"Ay."

"But will our king give his countenance to such a thing?"

The charioteer shook his head slowly and sadly.

"Our king is but a crowned puppet," he said.

"Of his own heart, could he be left to himself, he might find humane and manly counsel; but that demon, the queen, is the responsible ruler. She possesses all the evil traits which characterise her imperial brother, and in her they are intensified by a subtlety and persistence which render them doubly dangerous. She is a fiend in very truth; and should her son presume to oppose her in her wickedness, she would poison him as she poisoned Amond and Asabeth. Ah, my brother, the doom is fixed. The Christians are to fall as the ripe grain falls before the knife of the reaper."

"It is horrible!" murmured Fabian. "But can there be no escape?"

"Not for the masses. Until Vangorion came I dreamed not that the danger was so near. I knew that in Rome the Christians were being hunted and slain without mercy; but I had not thought that the tide of destruction would set this way so soon. I had hoped that some inspired assassin might cut the tyrant down, and thus stop the dreadful flood. But it has come, and the most we can do is to save those who can be saved. It may be many; it may be few. Heaven alone knows what the result is to be!"

"But why is it?" the vine-dresser earnestly asked, whose honest, plodding mind could not comprehend the intent and purpose of the tyrant.

"Why should the emperor trouble himself so much about what we believe? If we are peaceful and law-abiding, why should he disturb us?—above all, why should he do us mortal harm? I cannot understand it."

"Can you understand why the wolf kills more than it can eat?"

"Because it is his nature to kill."

"You have spoken it, Fabian. It is the nature of the tyrant Domitian, and of his demon sister, to do the same. Yesterday I saw a merchant who had come direct from Rome, and the things he told me made me shudder as I never shuddered before. The vast amphitheatre which Vespasian built has been turned into a slaughter-house, where bulls and tigers and lions are the slayers, and Christian men

and women are the victims. He told me that one day, before he left the imperial city, Domitian turned five hundred Christians into the arena, naked and unarmed, then let in upon them a score of infuriated bulls; and while the frightened wretches were fleeing hither and thither, the monster, with his own hands, shot arrows at them from his elevated seat!"

"It is horrible! horrible!" groaned the vine-dresser.

"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord!" repeated Adonia, with her hands folded reverently upon her bosom. "I would rather my body were torn asunder by the beasts of prey than that a single shadow of Domitian's guilt should rest upon my soul!"

"Amen!" responded Spartanus, with earnest approval.

"And," added Fabian, "I would rather die in the blessed faith which Christianity inspires than live in the darkness of the heathen. I would rather wear the crown of glory in the world to come than wear the yoke of the tyrant on earth. Let us keep the faith, and trust in Heaven!"

To this a fervent "Amen" was responded from all.

"Now," said Spartanus, "it is time we thought of rest. Our gentle Adonia, I know, is weary and worn."

"You shall find comfortable beds, my friends," returned the vine-dresser, arising as he spoke. "We will seek our rest now, and in the morning we will consider our arrangements for the future. I will lead the way."

The kind host disposed of his guests as best he could, and before he retired he took good care that his gate and his outer doors were securely fastened. When he had reached his own chamber he found his good wife awake, to whom he explained as much of what had transpired as he thought advisable; and when she sought to blame him because he had not called her to come and welcome his guests, he told her that she should yet have opportunity for all the kind offices she could command.

"Well, well," she said, "I can at least pray for them."

"Yes," added Fabian, "we will pray together!" He did not give to his wife the terrible food for dreams which had been given to him.

(To be continued.)

THE following countries have applied for space for their Fine Art contributions in the International Exhibition galleries:—Baden, Bavaria, Belgium, France, Hesse, Hungary, Norway, Saxo-Weimar, Spain, Sweden, Italy, and Denmark; and the town of Düsseldorf.

SINGING SWANS.—These have usually been supposed to be fictitious, but an Icelandic writer states that he has often heard swans sing in one of the firths of Western Iceland, where hundreds of them congregate. In the morning and evening their singing is so loud that it can be heard miles away, and the mountains on both sides ring with the echo of it, for each individual seems to join in the chorus. The singing has not the slightest resemblance to the cackling of geese or the quacking of ducks. It is clear and full, and has a metallic ring. The notion that the singing is sweetest just before the swan's death is prevalent in Iceland. Their nests are in small inland lakes or tarns, only one pair nesting at a single lake.

SAFFRON.—Saffron consists of the threads (stig-mata and portion of the style) situated in the centre of the blossom of the *Crocus sativus*, one of the autumnal crocuses. These threads are picked out and carefully dried by artificial heat, and are then ready for commerce. When thus dried they are narrow threads about an inch long, of a brownish-red colour, and are called *hay saffron*. The greater part comes from Spain and France. It was formerly cultivated to a great extent in this country. Saffron Walden derives its name from the culture of it in the neighbourhood as early as the reign of Edward III. It was also grown in Hereford and Suffolk. The high price of saffron is an inducement to adulteration—safflower, marigold, shreds of dried beef, &c., being used for the purpose, though they are easily distinguished from genuine saffron threads. It was in great repute at one time as a remedy in various nervous and eruptive diseases. Celsus recommends an ointment of saffron to be rubbed on the heads of mad people: "*Prodest ad id atque etiam ad mentem ipsam componendam crocinum unguentum in caput datum.*" In Dr. Sydenham's works, a celebrated medical writer of the middle of the 17th century, we find several recipes containing it, especially in those for intermittent and eruptive fevers, among the latter the plague of 1665-6. It seems to have been known very far down the "corridors of time," for it is mentioned in the Bible, Solomon's Song, iv., 14, and in Homer's "Iliad," xiv., 346, which Pope translates:—"And flamy crocus made the mountain glow."

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

T. R.—We prefer the specimen signed "G. W. J." C. T. MIDDLETON.—Apply personally to the foreman of the joiners at the yard in question.

A. T. C.—The substance of the answer is tolerably good, but the attempt at versification is a failure.

J. T.—We are compelled to adhere to the published notice.

H. S. P.—The refrain, though appropriate in sentiment is harsh and unpoetical, spoiling, by its construction, what might have been an acceptable contribution. J. R. B.—The ode, in addition to technical faults, has all the defects of puerility, without a scintilla of its simplicity, beauty, or truth.

J. R.—We are not favourably impressed with your piece. The description is meagre, while many of the expressions are inaccurate and in bad taste.

EMMA M.—The handwriting, though peculiar and characteristic, is legible and bold. Would that the orthography were as free from blame!

E. W.—After a will is proved, it is deposited in the registry of the Court of Probate; at which place it can be inspected, as a matter of right.

E. M. B.—The monthly parts of THE LONDON READER are sold at sevenpence each, and they are published two or three days before the commencement of each calendar month.

O. M.—The component parts of a good lemonade are: Water, two gallons; powdered white sugar, two pounds; citric acid, half an ounce; essence of lemon, half an ounce.

LIZZIE.—The ailment reads as if it resulted from a feeble digestion. Try what plenty of open-air exercise will do for you, to which add a daily dose of quinine wine.

LAUGHING MAX.—Use the tweezers for an immediate practical remedy. To prevent a recurrence of the evil, pay greater attention to your habits of life, especially to your diet and to exercise in the open air.

J. M.—Newcastle-upon-Tyne is a borough containing many parishes. The parishes are comprised in the borough, not the borough in the parishes or in any one of them. Newcastle is also a seaport, and is situated in the county of Northumberland.

GRACE E.—We believe that in a former number we stated it is impossible to judge of the merits of a tale by the perusal of a fragment of the manuscript. That must not, however, be taken as an intimation that we desire the remainder to be forwarded.

N. E. R.—The tales "Woman and her Master," and "The Will and the Way," appeared in the first volume of THE LONDON READER. The story of "Self Made," in which the character of Ishmael occurs, also appeared in the same volume.

R. S.—Thanks for your recent effusions. The sentiments are admirable, but many of the old peculiarities of style still remain. Some lines are a foot too long, others two feet, and others are more prosaic than the prose which is usually written on such subjects.

A. G.—1. Your request is incompatible with our duties; were it otherwise, you have withheld the information which would enable us to comply. 2. Auburn is a distinct colour from hazel, and has many shades. It is often described as a fine fair colour.

E. M. Sr. M.—Avoid salted meats and damp feet. Take fresh vegetables as often as you can, and a glass of cold spring water, strongly flavoured with lemon-juice, the first thing every morning. To this add early hours and regular habits.

MINNIE'S handwriting is pretty. If she will be industrious, amiable, and good, Cupid himself will fall in love with her and take her under his especial care. Her heart will be made proof against any of his cruel darts, and will be reserved for some worthy man whom Cupid, in his wanderings through the world, will find and send her. The conditions must be duly observed.

ROSE G.—The wife can institute a suit for the restitution of conjugal rights in the Court for Divorce and Matrimonial Causes. The court would order the husband to return to live with the wife, unless he satisfied the court that he stayed away from a substantial reason. The question of alimony is in the discretion of the court. The proceedings would be attended by expense.

G. W.—You would find a difficulty in purchasing a small plot even were the any Inclosure Act in operation. Having fixed on a locality, you should put yourself in communication with the lord of the manor, or with any other persons of position, and induce them to aid

you in your benevolent project. The slips of idle land which many railway companies possess appear to be suitable for your purpose.

C. H.—A delicate paste can be made from rice flour. Mix the rice flour well with cold water, and gently simmer it over the fire until it assumes the requisite thickness. With regard to the removal of articles which have been cemented by paste, the only thing we can suggest is a little less damp and more patience. The tarnished gold lettering may be improved by careful rubbing with a clean leather. It cannot, however, be renewed except by the same process originally employed.

LILLY B.—It is unnecessary to raise the veil upon the occasion of a visit made upon a pure matter of business. Be not anxious about the rest. Your husband's approbation and affection are of more value to you than all the world besides. Rest content with that, and the exertion which the children demand from your hands. The fancies and the wishes of your so-called friends are injudicious. They will never add to the cheerfulness and happiness which you now enjoy.

I. O. U.—In our opinion you are too young to marry, therefore too young to be engaged. You can well afford to wait for seven years. During this time you can find opportunities for studying not only questions of domestic economy but also what is involved in the declaration which you make at the altar, where you will be required to say, in reference to your wife, that you will "love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and health," and so forth.

W. G. E.—We are unable to give a monosyllabic reply to a letter which we cannot thoroughly understand. It is, however, manifest that you take a morbid delight in dwelling upon something which should be forgotten. Good counsel would persuade you to "let bygones be bygones." Try this simple remedy, and avoid in future that which you consider has produced your bad state of health; this will soon be restored if you be cheerful, take plain, wholesome food, and inhale plenty of fresh air.

A TENDER THOUGHT.

A blooming garden, bright and gay,
With many a laugh and many a shout;
Sweet children were at merry play,
A gentle mother looking out.

Down from the curtained window bright
She watched her little ones, so free;
While in her face beamed fond delight,
That seemed a glory unto me.

Her eyes ran o'er with happy tears
Of brimming joy when they were glad;
A shadow crept across her brow
And veiled her smile when they were sad.

May it not be, from heavenly heights,
The mother that we lost below
Looks, from her home of rare delights,
On us, her children, born in woe?

That from her gentle hand of love
Sweet crumbs of comfort we receive—
Bright gifts from garnered fruits above?
Oh, that we only could believe! M. A. K.

S. and F.—1. A good paste blacking can be made by mixing together a pound of ivory black, half a pound of treacle, two ounces of olive oil, and two ounces of oil of vitriol. Add sufficient water to form into a paste. 2. A furniture polish can be made by dissolving a pound and a half of potash and a pound of virgin wax in a gallon of hot water. Then boil the whole for half an hour. After, take the wax and pound it in a mortar, adding soft water until it forms a paste. This paste, mixed with a little olive oil, is rubbed on to the furniture with a woollen cloth.

LORIE W.—A mere error of description will not invalidate a marriage duly contracted according to law by persons possessing a legal capacity to make the contract. If the error to which you allude is the only circumstance that can be alleged in favour of the wife's freedom, it will not avail. She is still bound, notwithstanding her husband has left her. She cannot marry again. She may obtain a protection order from a magistrate upon certain conditions, or, if she can afford it, she may commence a suit for the restitution of conjugal rights.

H. B.—In estimating the cost of obtaining a patent, some allowance must be made for the expense of specifications and the drawings connected therewith. Then there are the agent's expenses, which cannot very well be dispensed with. The fees payable to the government officials are 15l. for provisional protection for six months; 10l. extra for the letters patent; 50l. additional at or before the expiration of the third year; and 100l. more at or before the expiration of the seventh year. These payments would be increased in the event of opposition.

F. T. is in error in supposing that the pipes burst during a thaw; it occurs at the time of freezing, though the effect is not usually felt until a thaw takes place. Water on freezing expands about 1-11th of its volume, its specific gravity at ordinary temperatures being 1.00, whilst that of ice is .917. This expansion commences about 4 degrees above freezing-point, and is completed at the moment of solidification with almost irresistible force. A good plan to prevent the freezing of pipes, provided the frost be not too severe, and you have sufficient water to spare, is to leave a tap constantly dripping so as to keep the water in pipes in continual motion. On the principle that prevention is better than cure, it would surely be wiser when building a house to arrange to conduct the pipes along an inner wall instead of, as usual, placing them in a position where they are pretty certain to be attacked by frost. Perhaps the plumbers would object to this arrangement as being injurious to their trade.

J. W. twenty-three, tall, and has a good business. Respondent must be about twenty, and fond of home.

ELIZA, seventeen, domesticated, fond of home, and an orphan. Respondent must be young and hard-working.

LOUISA S., tall, genteel, good looking, and loving. Respondent must be tall, dark, and good looking.

ROSEBUD, twenty-two, tall, fair, good looking, and do-

meaticated. Respondent must be tall, dark, good looking, and able to keep a wife.

EDITH, nineteen, tall, brown hair, very nice eyes, a nice figure, and loving. Respondent should be in the army.

N. and M., both tradesmen's daughters, eighteen, loving, and domesticated. Respondents must be tall, dark, able to keep a wife, and not over twenty-two.

FATE ROSAMOND, twenty-eight, tall, fair hair, dark blue eyes, small features, fresh complexion, small hands and feet, very loving, and will have a small income.

EDITH, twenty, medium height, light hair and eyes, fair complexion. Respondent must be cheerful, and fond of home; a mechanic preferred.

ALBERTINA, nineteen, medium height, brown hair, and hazel eyes. Respondent must be fond of home; a mechanic preferred.

DESDERMONA, seventeen, tall, dark curly hair, lively disposition, good looking, and entitled to about 300l. Respondent must be of gentlemanly appearance.

ANNIE N., twenty-one, short, stout, and would make a good wife. Respondent must be tall, dark, good looking, and fond of home.

J. M. R., twenty, medium height, blue eyes, light hair, fair complexion, loving, and a tradesman's daughter. Respondent must be tall, dark, fond of home, and affectionate.

E. A. B., nineteen, dark hair and eyes, fair complexion, tall, well educated, and fond of home. Respondent must be tall, dark, and move in good society.

GERALDINE, nineteen, medium height, golden hair, merry, a good pianist, and able to sing. Respondent must be dark, of gentlemanly appearance, and loving.

LAUGHING EYES, eighteen, fair, dark wavy hair, petite, of a merry disposition, and with expectations. Respondent must be tall, dark, and of manly appearance; a clerk preferred.

H. E., twenty, medium height, dark curly hair, affectionate, and fond of home. Respondent should be a tall, dark young man, about twenty-nine, possessing the means to keep a wife.

W. R. F., twenty-four, 5ft. 5in., in a lucrative profession, a teetotaler, loving, and fond of music and home. Respondent must be twenty-one or twenty-two, medium height, good looking, fond of home, and of gentle disposition.

T. H. G. J., and J. C., three chums, would like to correspond with some young ladies with a view to matrimony. "T. H." twenty-two, 5ft. 5in., brown hair, hazel eyes, dark complexion, fond of dancing, and good tempered. "G. J." twenty-two, 5ft. 10in., auburn hair, whiskers, and moustache, blue eyes, good looking, and a good dancer. "J. C." twenty-one, 5ft. 10in., fair complexion and hair, hazel eyes, and good looking, and all in the Navy. Respondents must be under twenty, and good looking.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

SARAH C. is responded to by—"J. B. B." thirty-nine, a widower with one child aged thirteen.

HETTY by—"Sheet Anchor Tom," twenty-two, 5ft. 7in., dark hair and complexion, and in the Navy.

FLASHING LIGHT by—"Fair Lily," twenty, tall, good teeth, blue eyes, fond of home, can sing, fond of music and dancing, and loves a sailor.

CLAUDE M. by—"Brownie," twenty-five, slight figure, dark hair and eyes, small mouth, well educated, and a good pianist and singer.

C. J. J. by—"Violet," tall, handsome, and has a yearly income of 150l.; "Amy B.," medium height, good looking, dark, will have money on her wedding-day, and would not object to exchange cards; and—"Josephine," young, good looking, loving, and has an income.

A. G. C. by—"Sarah," twenty-two, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes, good looking, loving, and domesticated; "Alice Jane," twenty-four, brown eyes and hair, and dearly loves a sailor; and—"May," twenty-four, medium height, fair, blue eyes, affectionate, and domesticated.

FLORA ROYAL by—"Polly C.," twenty-one, medium height, light brown hair, dark gray eyes, used to keeping house, and of a loving disposition; "Christie," twenty, medium height, dark hair, hazel eyes, pretty, good tempered, and domesticated; and—"F. J. O. G.," who desires his cards.

TELEMACHUS by—"M. S.," twenty, medium height, and fair. A Daughter of the Regiment," twenty, tall, handsome, and a good singer and dancer; and—"A. F. C.," eighteen, pretty, fond of children, educated, domesticated, and considers that a fortune in a wife is better than a fortune with a wife.

LAST ROSE OF SUMMER by—"S. H.," who would like carte with view to correspondence.

J. V. M. wishes to hear from "J. H. S." at her earliest convenience.

ARCEON JACK would like to hear from "Dinah."

LOVELY LOTTIE thinks she will suit "J. L. S."

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Also, the TITLE and INDEX to Vol. XV. Price ONE PENNY.

NOTICE.—Part 94, for MARCH, Now Ready, price 7d., with large Supplement Sheet of the Fashions for MARCH.

N.B.—CORRESPONDENTS MUST ADDRESS THEIR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR OF "THE LONDON READER," 334, Strand, W.C.

††† We cannot undertake to return Rejected Manuscripts. As they are sent to us voluntarily, authors should retain copies.

HEAD-DRESSES, APRON, EMBROIDERED INSERTION, TOILETTE BOX, CROCHET ROSETTES, &c., &c.

HEAD-DRESSES.—Nos. 1 & 3.
The flowers of which the illustration No. 1 is

It is covered with scarlet cashmere, which is arranged in folds which only the illustration can properly describe. The exterior folds are of black velvet ribbon. Slightly wad the handle, then cover it with red cashmere in puffs. Finally cover the cashmere with point lace embroidery, and, guided by the illustration, put the last ornamentation in the shape of rosettes in crochet.

tinguished-looking, and are quite as convenient as round hats, since they fit the head closely, and may be removed without disarranging the hair. Gipsies are not worn as far forward as formerly. They show a little of the parted hair above the forehead, and fit snugly over the top of the drooping chatelaine of massive plaits.

FASHIONS.
MILLINERS have no fear of a dearth of fashions for the next season. Some of the leading French milliners and



HEAD-DRESS.—No. 1.

formed are poppies, contrasted with grapes and ivy-leaves. No. 2 consists of a white rose with leaves and buds, which are turned into a wreath.

BLACK SILK APRON.—No. 2.

This apron is trimmed with black velvet, black silk fluting at the edge of velvet, and fringe.



BLACK SILK APRON.—No. 2.

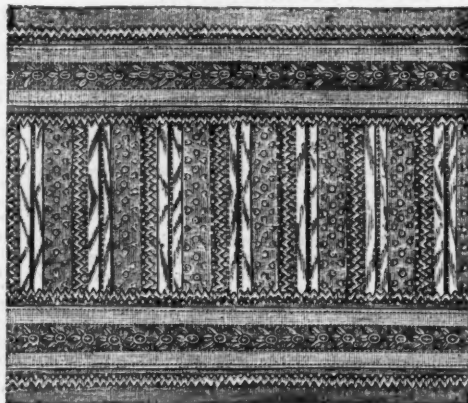
modistes—among them Virot, Worth, and Pingat—have made Brussels their head-quarters for the present, and are now busily engaged preparing the spring styles. This French prestige will make Brussels fashions popular. There may not be so great a



HEAD-DRESS.—No. 3.

A glimpse inside a milliner's rosewood cabinet shows the bonnets for receptions and visiting called for at this season. They are of light colours, palest rose, sky blue, and mauve, without a single white one in their midst. Royale and cut velvet are the fabrics; white tulle, lace, ostrich feathers, and flowers, the trimmings. One of rose pink royale has a barbe of point d'Alençon for trimming, while the plain crown is almost covered with eglantine, a single wild rose blossom, and a vine of bronzed leaves and buds. A second gipsy, of sky blue velvet, has long velvet strings two inches wide, to tie under the chin. A puff of white tulle over a velvet band forms the face trimming. A standing frill of lace round the crown is surmounted by a blue ostrich tip that falls forward from behind. Streamers of white tulle droop on the chatelaine.

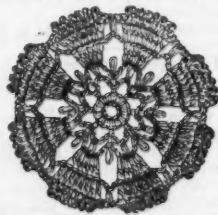
Ladies who buy three or four bonnets at once



INSERTION FOR UNDERCLOTHING.—No. 5.

variety of styles, or such abundance of material, but there will be many rich, beautiful, and withal novel things, designed with the same taste that always distinguishes French millinery.

Bonnets have become visible, tangible things, large



CROCHET ROSETTE.—No. 4.

scallop, 1 ss in the next s. Repeat from *.

The next round of p, and also that of the following round of long s, also the last round of ss and ch are clearly explained by the illustration.

No. 6 begins with 12 ch.

1st round.—20 ss round the ring.

2nd and 3rd rounds.—Ss and ch as illustrated.

4th round.—Crochet the loops.

5th round.—1 s in each loop on the other side of the crochet ch, always 3 ch between.

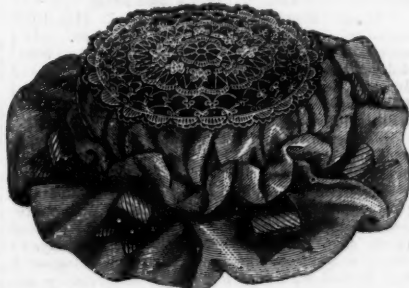
6th round.—Surround each ch so with 4 ss.

INSERTION FOR UNDERCLOTHING.—No. 5.

This illustration consists of embroidered insertion joined on the cross by means of worked batiste.

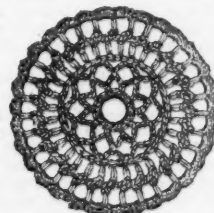
TOILETTE BOX.—No. 7.

This box measures about nine inches either way.



TOILETTE BOX.—No. 7.

enough to form a covering for the head, and are likely to increase in size. The close half-gipsy, half-cottage shapes will remain in vogue, and are gradually superseding round hats. They are universally becoming, and, ladies say, have "character," are dis-



CROCHET ROSETTE.—No. 6.

supply themselves with one of black lace for intermediate seasons. Nothing can be handsomer for late winter and early spring. These are extremely stylish when trimmed with ostrich tips of Nile green, blue, or rose-colour, instead of the tea-roses and pink flowers so long worn. Ladies who object to any colour permit richly carved jets and a black ostrich tip for garniture.

Chip and English straw gipsies, trimmed with black velvet and ostrich tips, are advised by modistes for regular spring wear. Some of these have a straw curtain or cape, others will have a velvet curtain, and again others leave the chatelaine exposed. Black straws will also be used, and not smooth straws only, but the serviceable rough-and-ready. Later in the season velvet and feathers will be too heavy, and thick repped ribbons, with the fine French flowers now so little used, will be restored. Very large

flowers, especially great crushed roses with browned leaves, will be stylish; also wreaths and clustered sprays of violets and ivy. Donna Maria gauze, black, white, and coloured, will also be used on spring straws in the way of ruches and scarfs.

FASHIONS FOR APRIL.

WHEN dove-like peace is once more settled in all its loveliness in shattered France—when her sons once more enjoy this world's good things, and her daughters have leisure to think of dress, what will be the feelings of the latter to find that in friendly rivalry a friendly nation has gained so much ground in the race of fashion—in that important art which enables the fair to show off to the greatest advantage that precious gift of beauty by which alone woman has reigned, when almost every other boon was, if not bestowed on man, rendered in a manner his by the superior strength which enables him to grasp everything?

But to return to what it is our especial duty to discuss—the fashions. We do not agree with one of our contemporaries that, without French aid, we have displayed more good taste and elegance than ever; merely that we have contrived to keep in the favour of the fickle goddess. In full dress, for instance, how rich and becoming are some of the dresses displayed by first-rate West-end Leapers and milliners?

The solemn season of Lent is now almost a thing of the past, and the season *par excellence* for dancing is coming on. All the pressing affairs of the state are being discussed by Lords and Commons, and in the train of these magnates of the land—magnates for wisdom—the magnates of *bon ton* follow. All the ambassadors are in town, but we do not pretend to say that they themselves would be eager to figure away foremost in the square or the round dances; but our fair readers must recollect, and with satisfaction, the sons and young *attachés* will be on the *qui vive* to welcome the belles. And how often the amiable, graceful, and well-dressed partner in the dance is sought for as the cherished partner for life!

We will now describe a few ball costumes, with reference to choice according to complexion. For a brunette the *oiseau de paradis* colour is especially becoming. The skirt is double, and, as all ball dresses should be, is cut round. For dinner or *assemblée* full dress, the long train is to be recommended as adding much to the elegance of the appearance; but for dancing, comfort and even safety are impeded by the *queue*. To proceed with the *oiseau* costume: Of course the body is low, and the sleeves short. Black lace is lavishly employed in the trimming of the corsage and skirt. Where the upper skirt is caught up on either side, *oiseau* satin ribbon bows with floating ends are placed, as also at intervals on the black silk net puffing that surrounds the lower skirt. The corsage is of *oiseau* satin, as also the bretelles worn with the body, which receives its finish by means of a black lace berthe. The ornaments should consist of a diamond tiara, with earrings and necklace of the same precious stones. This costume is suited for a young married lady.

Another very becoming ball-dress for a dark beauty consists of a full pink skirt and corsage, with clouds of net of the same colour in puffings over the body, and three skirts over the deep pink glacé composing the dress. Full pink roses trim the body, and are placed where the various skirts are caught up; the roses are mounted. We recommend gold ornaments with this ball costume.

For a blonde a ball-dress of Oxford blue satin with tulle over it to match. Let the corsage have the basque *d'Italie*, and be cut *carrié*. The berthe is rather a succession of blue silk net quillings than a thing apart. The basques behind, of the same satin as the body, are in three pieces of about two feet in depth, that in front, which is of one foot in depth, is pointed. All are richly edged with white silk ruffles. Folds of Oxford blue satin head the plissé net flounces, two in number, on the blue silk net skirt. Turquoise necklace and bracelets should be worn with this costume, and in the hair bunches of bluebells sparkling with dew.

We now proceed to the description of a ball-dress for a young lady in her first season. The corsage and skirt are of white glacé. The body has three basques on either side of white glacé edged with bouillonnés of figured silk net, which material forms two skirts over the glacé petticoat. In this ball costume wild roses form a conspicuous part. From the right side on the waist a garland of wild roses with buds and foliage is carried across the front and ends, having caught up the first skirt in three folds of both skirts over the glacé. The hem is finished off with rich silk bouillonnés. Wild roses mix with the net of the corsage and the sleeves, and a choice wild rose wreath is worn round the head adorned with bouffé curls. Pearl earrings and necklace complete this ball-dress.

For out-of-door costume the wraps can generally be dispensed with, but in April, as in March, a good deal of caution is necessary to escape the effects of the east wind, so prevalent at this season. The velvet mantel in any becoming dark colour is still seasonable; dark green or violet, for instance, with a deep black lace flounce. This, with a dress of steel gray *poult de soie* and gipsy bonnet of ponceau satin, would be suitable for the first half of April. A white ostrich feather would trim this bonnet agreeably—we allude to the outside. For the inside front we recommend two papillon bows of ponceau satin ribbon. The strings are of similar ribbon, and tie this small gipsy bonnet under the chin. We confess never to have much admired these gipsy bonnets, but they must prove becoming to many as they still enjoy favour, and by their appearance in summer straws it seems that they will not quit the field. The waist in dresses is still where it ought to be—as nature has assigned it, and with the exception of a little too much of what is elaborate, we consider the trimming of the skirts in good taste.

THE EARL'S SECRET.

CHAPTER XXXI.

What can we not endure
Where pains are lightened by the hope of cure?
Dryden.

WHEN Mrs. Lyell taunted her hapless captive with cherishing the hope of hearing again from Philip she doubtless desired in her malignant heart to provoke the unfortunate girl to some passionate outbreak; but in this she was disappointed. Griselda felt that she could not lower herself by replying to this charge; so silence was maintained for some considerable time. Mrs. Lyell was sitting bolt upright upon her chair, not a sign of sleepiness or weariness in her round black eyes.

Griselda seemed thoughtful, and during a long interval of silence kept her eyes fixed upon the carpet, while Mrs. Lyell fastened hers upon Griselda.

"Mrs. Lyell," she said, at length, looking up, "have you never had any letters since we came here except those you received from papa?"

The woman moved uneasily in her chair, and looked at Griselda sharply; a shade of anger swept over her face, making her yellow skin almost livid. "No," she answered, curily. "Can you not think of anything but letters?"

"I wonder you do not hear from your daughter," Griselda said. "I think you told me, when we first came here, that you had written to her. Where is she?"

"My daughter?" the woman's tones were more harsh, but less firm. "She is well enough off, I dare say. She is able to take care of herself. Why should I know or care where she is?"

The beautiful girl looked up wonderingly. "Because she is your child, and you seemed to think so much of her that night when dear Lady Alloway was murdered."

Mrs. Lyell's face turned from a livid hue to a yellowish white. Her eyes blazed like meteors.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Lyell, if I have offended you. I did not mean to. But I should be so sorry if I thought you were neglecting your own daughter to serve me. How I should like to see her. Her name is Griselda—the one I bear now. Do I resemble her as much as you thought I did that night when you and I first saw each other? You know it was my resemblance to her which made you pity me and wish to befriend me at the first. I suppose you meant well, but I have always been sorry since that I did not go to Calais that night, even if I had to go alone and on foot. I think papa made a great mistake when he bade me come away and bear a false name."

"My girl doesn't look a bit like you," Mrs. Lyell spoke her words fast, and with averted face. "If I ever said you resembled her I was foolish. There! did you hear that noise? What could it have been? It was towards the balcony. Can it be that that fellow has flung another letter to his lady love? I will soon know."

She passed through the window to the balcony, to look for a letter, which, it is needless to say, she was not likely to find.

The noise which had aroused the woman's suspicion, and caused Griselda to tremble with apprehension, had been occasioned by Philip, across whose mind, as the conversation regarding Mrs. Lyell's daughter went on, a conception of the startling truth had flashed with such force as to momentarily unnerve him; so that he sank, or rather reeled upon the window seat, striking with his elbow as he did so one of the mullions in such a manner as to produce a ringing sound.

Mrs. Lyell, having searched the balcony, and seeing no boat upon the moonlit water, was disposed to regard the matter lightly. So when she returned she said:

"I am going now, and you'd better go to bed, and to sleep, because you will get no letter to-night. See! it is clouding over. The moon is hid, and the fellow couldn't hurl a letter on to the balcony if he tried all night."

Saying this, she went out of the room. A few seconds after the key was heard turning in the lock Philip stepped out from behind the curtain. Griselda was standing near the open window.

The young man went to her side, and took her hands within his own, saying:

"I have made a sudden resolve, Griselda. I am going back to Silvermere. There—I am going to be arbitrary, and not allow you to ask questions. I will tell you all when I come back. I believe the mystery of the Lorain Wood will soon be made clear; so keep up a good heart. I shall start immediately after my poor little sister's funeral. Let me charge you on no account to mention this to Mrs. Lyell. I do not like that woman."

"When will you be likely to return to Dunhaven with papa?" Griselda asked.

"I will set out on the day after to-morrow, and, if nothing happen, will return on the third day."

"If nothing happen, Philip?" Griselda asked, turning pale. "You must not go if there is danger in the way to you."

Philip longed to clasp her to his breast, but instead he turned resolutely to the secret entrance, and with a few low-spoken words of farewell was quickly beyond the view of the girl he passionately loved.

In a few days all that was mortal of Aurora Lesage was borne in a flower-wreathed casket from the cottage and laid in the grave.

Philip then departed—not for Edinburgh, as Mrs. Lesage and her sister-in-law supposed, but as Griselda knew—for Silvermere.

Since the ball Lady Valeria's spirits had alternated between great buoyancy and extreme dejection. The former experience was due to the fact that she was engaged, though secretly as yet, to marry Lord Olney; the latter to the fear, which at times almost amounted to conviction, that Philip Monteith would return to denounce her as an interloper.

One morning, two days subsequent to the burial of Aurora Lesage, at Dunhaven, Lady Valeria yielded to Mrs. Gabron's persistent demands so far as to grant her son an interview.

He was at that moment enjoying a quiet cigar in his mother's little sitting-room, he having come from London the evening previous.

At the hour appointed she descended to the room to meet him. She first went to the mantelpiece and touched the bell-pull. Then a footman entered, and the lady addressed him:

"Trimble, you will not forget what I have told you? Whenever a young and handsome gentleman calls to see Lord Walsingham, you are to show him to the library, and let me know immediately."

"Yes, my lady."

She said no more, and the footman withdrew. Soon Gabron entered. He had not seen the girl whom he had been instrumental in placing in the room of the earl's wronged daughter since the night of the ball.

"Mr. Gabron," she said, "will you please state your business with me?"

"My business with you? You ought to know it. If it was Lord Olney, now—"

"There," said she, petulantly, waving her hand, "why need you speak of Lord Olney? What is he to you or me?"

"He is a man whom you propose to marry for his wealth, his position, and because once his wife you will be a titled lady whether you are rejected by Lord Walsingham as a base interloper or not. I witnessed the kiss which sealed your betrothal at the ball. Ah, you little thought that at that happy moment that your marplot was so near."

Lady Valeria arose from her seat and drew herself to her full height. Her eyes emitted sparks of fire as she said:

"Since you are an eavesdropper by your own confession and a mean spy, you may go from my sight, and at once, Randal Gabron."

He sprang to his feet and clutched her arm, savagely demanding:

"Girl, are you mad? I have only to go to the earl, and utter half a dozen words, and you will be driven from Silvermere in disgrace. Perhaps you would be more than merely disgraced. I have had misgivings of late. What has become of Leonard Grafton? Oh, you turn pale. Are you going to faint? No; I thought you were not so silly as that."

"Go, sir, this minute, or I will have the servants here to eject you. I have in my possession certain papers which, if I choose, will transport you to a penal colony. You look agast. You do not ask what these papers are, for you know. But you would

der how I came by them. Well, I will tell you. I stole them from your mother's drawer. She had obtained possession of them at the cost of all her savings, so carefully hoarded for years. I could have kissed the foolish woman for not having burnt them when I got my hand upon them. Now, go to Lord Walsingham, you or your mother, if you dare."

Foaming with rage, the baffled man released his hold of the bold girl, and stalked out of the room.

He had barely gone when Trimble entered, saying that the young gentleman whom she expected had called.

"You told him the earl was ill, and unable to see visitors?"

"Yes, my lady; and he's writing a note to send to his lordship."

The lady's eyes sparkled.

"He will give you that note to deliver to papa, and you will bring it to me."

"Yes, my lady."

The footman repaired to the library, into which, a short time before, he had ushered Philip Monteith. He soon returned, and placed in her hands a sealed envelope addressed to Lord Walsingham.

"The gentleman expects a reply, my lady."

"Certainly. He shall have an answer," said the lady. "I will carry this note to papa myself, and bring his reply."

She left the room with Philip's note clutched in her fingers, and repaired to her boudoir. In a little while she came down, and a few minutes later Trimble bore a sealed note to Philip. As soon as the footman had gone the young man tore open the envelope, and this is what he read:

"The contents of your note have bewildered me. I hardly know what to think or what to do first. We must somehow manage—if what you write is true—to bring my poor child home to confront this bold, bad girl without exciting her suspicions. I must have time to think of a plan. If I am well enough—and I feel so much improved since yesterday that I think I shall be—I will meet you to-night under the archway by the tower in the rear of the house. I prefer to meet you there instead of in the house, because here we are liable to be seen and overheard by my pretended daughter, or some one in her pay. I will be under the archway as soon as twilight closes."

After carefully reading this note, to which his lordship's name was appended, Philip departed.

At dark the young man stood under the archway by the tower.

(To be continued.)

FACETIÆ.

"We all owe something to our country," said the man who went abroad without having paid his income-tax.

FEMININE GOSSIP.—"I heard it." "Who told you?" "Her friend!" "You don't say?" "Tis dreadful!" "Yes, awful!" "Don't tell it, I pray." "Good gracious!" "Who'd think it?" "Well! well! well! dear me!" "I have my suspicions!" "And I, too, you see!" "Heav'n help us!" "Poor creature!" "So artful!" "So sly!" "No beauty!" "Quite thirty!" "Between you and I!" "I'm going!" "Do stay, love!" "I can't!" "I'm forlorn!" "Farewell, dear!" "Good-bye, sweet!" "I'm so glad she's gone!"

A BITING REMARK.

Precocious Child: "I wish poor mamma had such teeth as you have, Aunt Clara."

Aunt Clara: "Why?"

Precocious Child: "Because then she would never have the toothache—she could take them out when they pained her."—*Will-o'-the-Wisp.*

THE BRITISH BULL-DOG.

John Bull: "Why, Cardwell, what have you been doing to my dog? He seems to have lost his spirit."

Cardwell: "Well, sir, we've only drawn his teeth, and tried the effect of a 'liberal' economy upon him."—*Will-o'-the-Wisp.*

HAVE YOU BEEN DONE?—Not long ago the universal question was, "How's your poor feet?" Now, with equal sympathy, and greater grammatical accuracy, we say, "How's your poor arm?"—*Punch.*

AN APT ILLUSTRATION.—Rowland Hill was in the habit of taking nearly everything he saw or heard into the pulpit, and using it in his sermons. When preaching on the government of the temper, he said: "I once took tea with an old lady who was very particular about her china. The servant unfortunately broke the 'best bread-and-butter plate'; but her mistress took very little notice of the circumstance at the time, only remarking: 'Never mind, Mary; accidents cannot be avoided.' 'My word, but I shall have it by-and-bye,' said the girl,

when she got out of the room. So it turned out: The old lady's temper was corked up for a season, but it came out with terrible vengeance when the company retired, and so it is with a man who sins—he may escape punishment for the minute, but it will be sure to find him out and give him particular fits."

CLEARING A DIFFICULTY.

Irascible Traveller: "I say, boots, I want to catch the 415 train. Bring me a cab."

Boots: "You're too late, sir. A cab couldn't do it."

Irascible Traveller: "Con-found you! Bring two cabs, then!"—*Punch.*

ANOTHER OF MR. JARVIS'S DIAGNOSES.

"Oh, good morning, Jarvis. You've not been ill again?"

"No, miss; it's the missis have been took indifferent this time!"

"What's the matter with her?"

"Well, miss, the young medical gentleman he says to me: 'Why, Jarvis!' he says, 'your missus 'ave got bronchitis in hevery blessed limb of 'er body!'"—*Punch.*

FLAWS.

Oh, sunshine, like a cloth of gold

Drawn out along the air,

The clouds, or yellow, black, or brown,

A-sailing up, a-sailing down,

But make you doubly fair!

Oh, grasses, like a queen's gay shawl

Upon her crowning day,

The border of rough prickly burs,

And nettles black, and wilding furze,

Your tenderer tints display.

Oh, bird of ragged quill, and wing

As speckled as a flower,

Sing, sing your heart up to your throat;

'Tis just the one wild, wailing note

That gives your song its power.

Sweetheart of mine—sweetheart of mine,

Whom all my thoughts adore,

Hide your blue eyes, and frown and pout:

It is our little fallings out

That make us love the more!

Whatever things be fine or bright—

Gay grass, or golden air,

Or red of rose, or lily's snow—

It is the flaw that makes them so;

All fair would not be fair!

Of better things, it seems to me,

Life's best is but the sign;

Else, in this wicked world, would be

No room for blessed charity—

No room for love divine.

L. C.

GEMS.

If you admit only true friends to your house, you will need very few extra chairs.

A SERVICE rendered in time, was it even little, can cause a great offence to be forgotten.

MANY preach, but few practice what they preach, for they never apply their sermons to themselves.

A MAN who is not able to make a bow to his own conscience every morning is hardly in a condition to respectfully salute the world at any other time of the day.

The true felicity of life is to be free from anxiety, to understand our duties towards Heaven and our fellow creatures, and to enjoy the present without too much concern about the future.

THE man who will stab at another's reputation by insinuation and innuendo is far worse than a thief. Property may be replaced, but character, once lost, is all but irredeemable, and, as a great writer has said, a word is enough to ruin a man.

It is not always in the most distinguished exploits that men's virtues or vices may be discerned; but frequently an action of small note, a short saying, or a jest, distinguishes a person's real character more than fields of carnage or the greatest battles.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HOW TO KEEP EGGS.—The value of eggs in the sick chamber is only too generally known to be commented on; our object is to give timely warning that this most valuable food, for which no substitute is to be found, should be economically dealt with, as a very great scarcity must inevitably result. We need expect no importation of French eggs this season; the consequence will be that the supply of English and Irish eggs will be inadequate to the demand. The best means of preserving them is to pack them in salt, with the smaller end directed

downwards. The "buttering" system is expensive and uncertain, but packing them in salt so excludes the air and keeps them safe that the discovery of an unwholesome or decomposed egg is the exception. Fowls may be induced to keep laying by feeding them on morsels of uncooked beef and fat, and by mixing a little cayenne pepper with their food.

NEW POINTS IN THE CHEMISTRY OF MILK.—Important observations recently made indicate that the specific gravity of milk is a very uncertain guide to its strength. It appears that mere keeping for three or four days in a closed vessel determines a change in the density of milk—that in point of fact milk expands on being kept, so that its specific gravity falls sometimes even below that of water. An explanation of this strange phenomenon was sought in the assumption that fermentation of the milk-sugar had taken place, and that by this means the milk had been charged with alcohol, which would, of course, render it lighter. Direct experiment has, however, failed to detect the least trace of alcohol. The spontaneous expansion of volume must therefore be due to some strange molecular change in the casein, and possibly also in the milk-sugar.

STATISTICS.

THE NEW LAW COURTS.—EXTRAORDINARY BUILDING TENDERS.—The following are the tenders sent in by twenty of the leading London building firms for putting in the foundations for the new Law Courts in the Strand, under Mr. Street, the architect: Messrs. Gammon and Sons, 68,347l.; Holmes and Nichol, 66,900l.; Lucas Brothers, 65,719l.; Myers and Sons, 57,475l.; Lee and Sons, 56,500l.; Taylor, Johnson, and Smith, 54,240l.; Markwick and Thurgood, 49,000l.; Holland and Hannen, 48,300l.; Kirk, 48,182l.; Webster, 47,500l.; Cubitt and Co., 46,555l.; Brass, 46,240l.; Trollope and Sons, 45,473l.; Berry, 44,973l.; Browne and Robinson, 44,690l.; Hill, Keddall, and Waldrom, 42,750l.; Higgs, 41,987l.; Henshaw, 38,350l.; Arford and Whillier, 37,175l.; Dove Brothers, 36,755l. It will thus be seen that the difference in amount between the highest tender, 68,347l., and the lowest, 36,755l., is nearly 32,000l.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A STATEMENT is published that Her Majesty has been vaccinated, and wishes the fact to be generally known.

THE Japanese have but one newspaper, which comes out once a month, in the shape of a stitched pamphlet of about 100 pages.

THE vaccination of the officials connected with the departments at Whitehall and Somerset House has been carried out by direction of the authorities.

THE Duke of Richmond, Earl Granville, and Sir Alex. Milne have been elected elder brethren of the Trinity House.

MESSRS. John O'Connor and E. C. Barnes have been commissioned by the Queen to paint the picture of the marriage of the Princess Louise.

THE Secretary for War has determined to abolish forthwith the system of branding deserters and men of bad character in the army.

At a meeting of wholesale and retail stationers recently held in London, resolutions were passed condemning the system under which postal cards were issued to the public, as the price charged covered the cost of the postage alone, and thus the public were supplied gratuitously with writing materials. A committee was appointed to make representations to the Postmaster-General.

A LARGE number of newspapers posted for places abroad are found to be prepaid with a halfpenny stamp only, and are consequently not forwarded. A great many newspapers are also posted for foreign parts much beyond the prescribed limit of eight days from the date of publication. A post-office notice has been issued cautioning the public to observe the regulations.

A FLAW IN THE VACCINATION ACT.—A curious point in the law of vaccination recently arose at the Wolverhampton Police Court. A person was summoned for not having had his child vaccinated. The default was admitted; but it was contended that the child itself must be produced in court, and proof given that it had not been vaccinated. The stipendiary magistrate, Mr. Spooner, decided that this must be done. But then a difficulty occurred. The magistrate said he could issue a warrant to bring a father into court, but he had no power to compel the father to bring his child. Ultimately Mr. Spooner granted a "case" for argument before a superior court. If the presence of the child is necessary to proof of omission to comply with the law, and if there is no power to compel the production of the child, then the law may be broken with impunity, for nobody can be punished for disobeying it.

Spring Flowers.

WALTZ.

WALTER SYDNEY.

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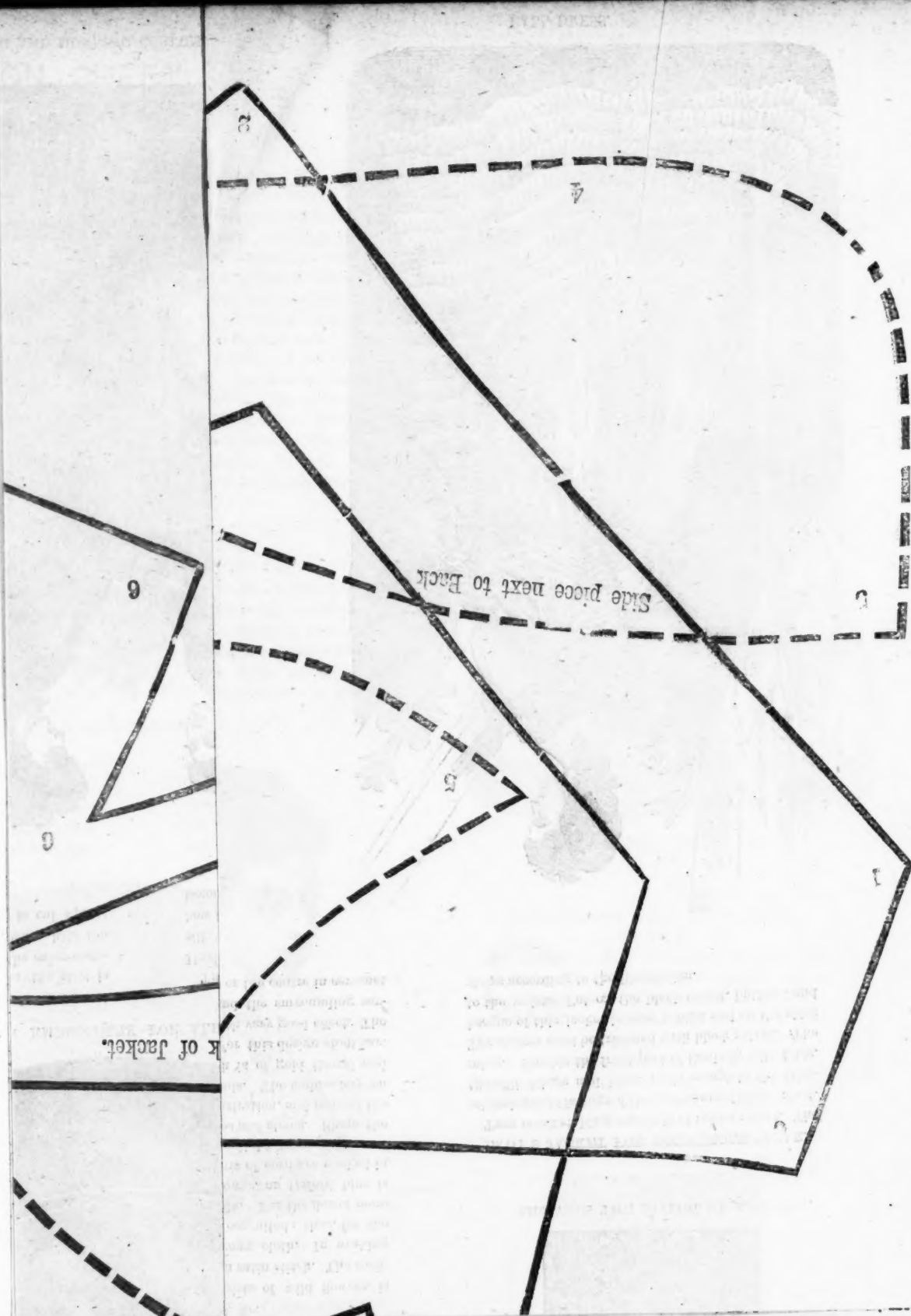
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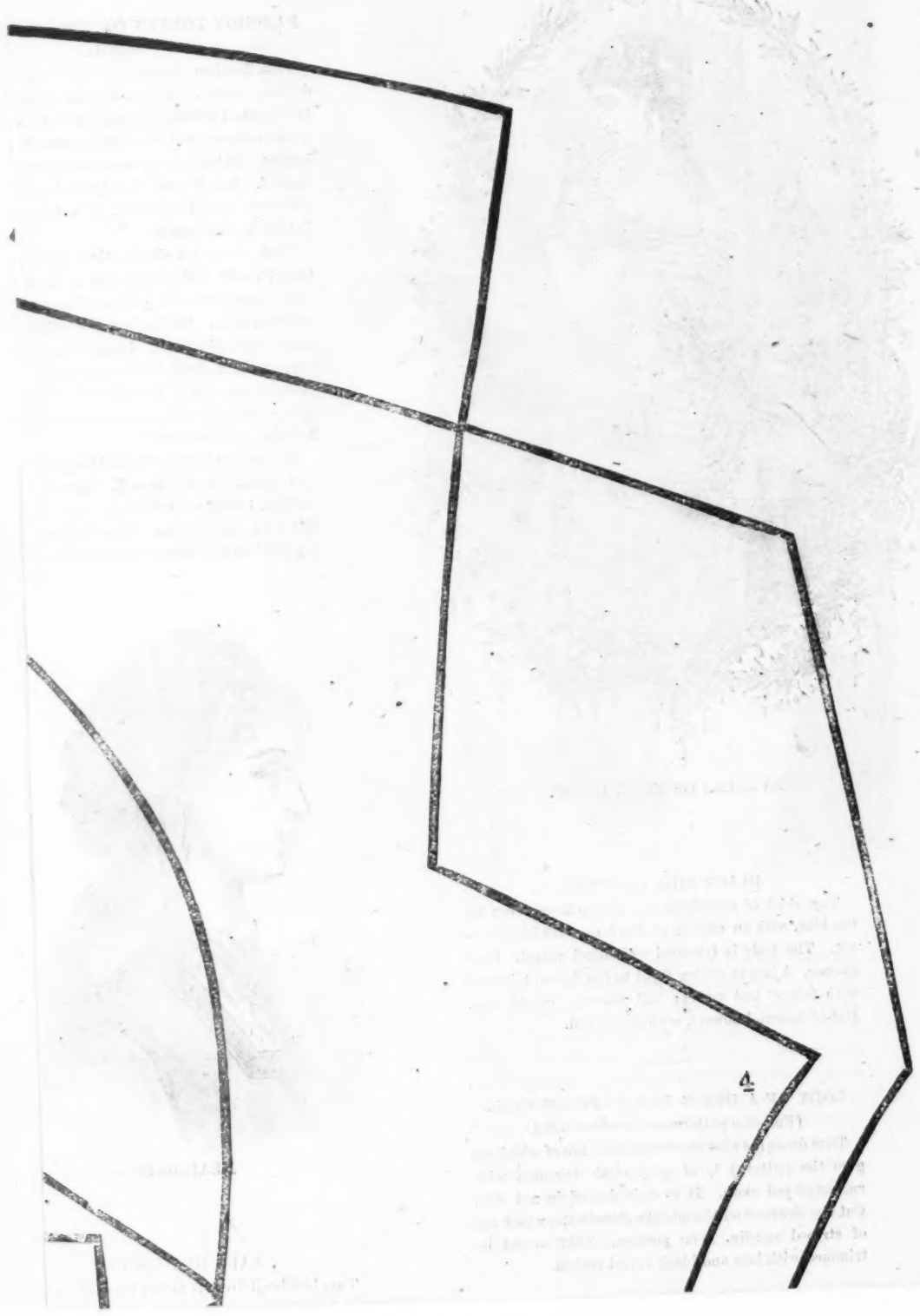
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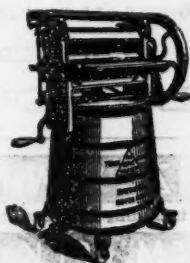
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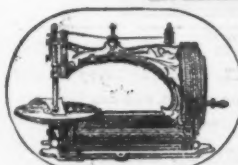
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